STATE AND ISLAM IN TURKMENISTAN (1991-2001)

DISSERTATION

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Declaration

I solemnly declare that the Dissertation entitled, "**State and Islam in Turkmenistan (1991-2001)",** submitted by me in the discipline of **Islamic Studies** under the supervision of Dr. G. N. Khaki embodies my own contribution. This work which does not contain any piracy, has not been submitted, so far, anywhere for the award of any degree.

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Certificate

Certified that the Dissertation entitled, "***State and Islam in Turkmenistan (1991-2001)"*** submitted by **Tabasum Jabeen** is suitable for submission and worthy to award the degree of Master of Philosophy subject to the approval of examiners. The scholar worked under my supervision on whole-time basis for the period required under statutes. The receptivity and conduct of the scholar has remained satisfactory.

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DEDICATED TO MY Beloved PARENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASSR,	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
BEC,	Bashkent Education Corp.
CERD,	End All Forms of Racial Discrimination
CIS,	Commonwealth of Independent States
CPSU,	Communist part of the Soviet Union
CPSU,	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CRA,	Council for Religious Affairs
EIU,	Economist Intelligence Unit
FBIS,	Foreign Broadcast Information Service
FERF,	Foreign Exchange Reserve Fund
FSU,	Former Soviet Union
GDP,	Gross Domestic Production
ICRC,	International Committee of the Red Cross
ILHR,	International League for Human Rights
IMU,	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IRP,	Islamic Renaissance Party
ITTU,	International Turkmen–Turk University
KNB,	National Security Committee
MBCAK,	Muslim Board for Central Asia and Kazakhstan
NMP,	Net Material Product
ODIHR,	Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE,	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
ROC,	Russian Orthodox Church
RSFSR,	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
SSR,	Soviet Socialist Republic
TCP,	Turkmenistan Communist Party
TDP,	Turkmenistan Democratic Party
THF,	Turkmenistan Helsinki Fund
TIHR,	Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights
USCIRF,	States Commission on International Religious Freedom
USSR,	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

CHAPTER - 1
INTRODUCTION

Country Profile

Turkmenistan, also known as Turkmenia**,** is one of the Turkic states in Central Asia. It is an independent neutral country which is located on the Eastern shore of the Caspian Sea, bordered by Afghanistan to the southeast, Iran to the south and southwest, Uzbekistan to the east and northeast, Kazakhstan to the north and northwest.[1] It was formerly the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic (Turkmen SSR) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which defines the strip of land largely inhabited by Turkic ethnic group called the Turkmen. The ethnic origins of the Turkmens, a loose alliance of Turkic tribes are generally traced to the Oghuz. It occupies an area of 488,100 square kilometers[2]. Most of its land is a vast arid desert. In fact, Central Asia's two largest deserts—the Garagum and the Gyzylgum—make up almost 90% of Turkmenistan's territory. To the south are the Balkan and Kopet Dag mountains[3]. Other geographical features are the Caspian Sea in the west, Charjew, on the Amu Darya in the east, and Dashoguz in the north. Other major rivers are the Tejen, the Murgap, and the Atrek. Mostly, Turkmenistan has a subtropical desert climate that is severely continental. Summers are long, hot, and dry, and winters are mild and dry[4]. Most precipitation falls between January and May. It is the least populated of the five former Soviet republics in Central Asia. With a population around five million, the majority of the people are ethnic Turkmens (85%); other sizeable minorities are Uzbeks (5%) and Russians (4%). Smaller minorities include Kazakhs, Azeris, Armenians, Ukrainians, Balochis, Koreans, and Tatars[5]. The Turkmens are divided into five major tribes: the Ersary, Goklen, Teke, Yasyr, and Yomut. There are more than

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[1] G.M. Howe, *The Soviet Union-A Geographical Study*, Longman, Hongkong, 1986, pp.437-438.
[2] The Columbia Encyclopedia, Columbia University Press Newyork, 2004, p.1.
[3] Elizabeth E Bacon, *Central Asians under Russian Rule*, London, 1960, p.10.
[4] Doosumov Rustom, Uzbekistan*: A Nation Path to the Market in* "Central Asia in Transition: Dilammas of Political and Economic Development", edited by Boris Rumer, Aakar Books, 2003, p.137.
[5] *The World Fact Book,* USA, p. 3. [cited Nov 10, 2009]. Available from: http://www.cia.gov/factbook

two dozen tribal groupings among the Turkmens today, the largest of which are Yomut, Ersari and Teke, to which president Niyazow belonged.

Turkmenistan's economy is largely based on natural resource extraction. Although the hydrocarbon sector performs well, according to the US Fund for Peace, fifty-eight percent of the population lives below the poverty level. According to the US State Department, in 2006, GDP per capita was $8,500. Poverty in rural areas also contributes to lower living standards[6]. In the Caspian Sea region of Turkmenistan, particularly in the Cheleken region where much of the oil development is centered, many people are employed in the oil and gas sector. Others are employed in agriculture, fishing and in the marine transport sector. As has been well documented elsewhere, the USSR's oil wealth came primarily from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Russia itself. Turkmenistan was also a significant contributor of natural resources to other Soviet republics, including oil and natural gas, which the Soviets began exploiting heavily in the 1970s. Other resources included cotton, fruits, and vegetables. This created an economy focused on resource exploitation rather than development. Therefore, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Turkmenistan, as many republics, went through a period of economic hardship, from which it is still recovering. During the Soviet period, Turkmenistan was one of the poorest republics, and since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it has continued to fall behind its Central Asian neighbours in most areas of development. Infant and maternal mortality rates are among the highest in the former Soviet Union (FSU), gross domestic production is lower than in the other Central Asian states and economic development is slow in comparison to its neighbours[7].

Turkmenistan has no state religion. It is predominately-Muslim country. An estimated 87% of the population practices Sunni Islam and 11 % Russian Orthodoxy. Islam in Turkmenistan often includes elements of mysticism and shamanism[8]. The literacy rate is 99.7%[9]. Life expectancy is 68.3 years.

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[6] *Economy of Turkmenistan*, Wikipedia encyclopedia, p.1.

[7] Michelle Kinman, Turkmenistan's Crude Awakening Oil, Gas and Environment in the South Caspian, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/Turkmenistan_statistics.html, accessed December 1, 2010.

[8] *Religion of Turkmenistan*, Wikipedia encyclopedia, p.1.

Although Russian is widely spoken in the region, the official language of Turkmenistan is Turkmen. Like other Central Asian people, the Turkmens have a rich folklore tradition of epic stories, tales, and lyric poems. A popular legend says that when Allah (God) made the world, the Turkmens were the first to get a land filled with sunshine, but the last to get any water. The Turkmen folklore tradition also includes various superstitions. Knowledge of and belief in charms, omens, lucky and unlucky days of the week, and the evil eye are common to almost every Turkmen. Each Turkmen tribe and clan has its own series of legends and tales that define tribal genesis and trace genealogy[10].

Turkmenistan is governed under the constitution of 1992. The president, who is both head of state and head of government, is elected by popular vote for a five-year term. There are two legislative bodies. The People's Council, which has the greater authority, consists of up to 2,500 delegates, some elected by popular vote and some are appointed. Members of the 50-seat National Assembly are popularly elected to serve five-year terms. A law adopted in 2003 effectively makes the president the head of both the executive and legislative branches of government. According to the constitution, Turkmenistan is a secular democratic and presidential republic. The government has three branches: Executive -- President and the Council of Ministers, Legislative -- Mejlis (Parliament), and Judicial -- Supreme Court. The legal system is based on the civil law system.[11] Turkmenistan's date of independence from the Soviet Union is recognized as October 27, 1991.[12] The United Nations formally recognized Turkmenistan's declaration of "permanent neutrality" in 1995. Turkmenistan has 5 administrative subdivisions: Velayats

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[9] United Nations Development Programme Report 2011, Wikipedia, *the free encyclopedia,* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_literacy_rate

[10] Countries and Their Cultures, Tajikistan to Zimbabwe, *http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Tajikistan-to-Zimbabwe/Turkmens.html*

[11] Peter L. Roudik, *The History of the Central Asian Republics*, (Greenwood Press, 88 Post RoadWest, Westport, CT 0688), p.153.

[12] Horak, 'The ideology of the Turkmenbashy regime',Perspective on European Politics and Society, Vol. 6, Issue 2, Special Issue: Eurasia and the Wider World, Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2005, p.313.

(provinces)[13] The capital is Ashgabat and currency is Manat. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov is the President and Rashid Meredov, the Foreign Minister.

Historical Background

The territory of Turkmenistan has a long and checkered history, as armies from one empire after another decamped there on their way to more prosperous territories. The region's written history begins with its conquest by the Achaemenid Empire of ancient Persia, as the region was divided between the satrapies of Margiana, Kharezm and Parthia. Alexander the Great conquered the territory in the 4th century BC on his way to Central Asia, around the time that the Silk Road was established as a major trading route between Asia and the Mediterranean Region. 150 years later, Persia's Parthian Kingdom established its capital in Nisa, now in the suburbs of the capital, Ashgabat . After replacement of the Parthian empire by Persian Sassanids, another native Iranian dynasty, the region remained territory of the Persian Empire for several centuries. In the 7th century AD, Arabs conquered this region, bringing with them Islam and incorporating the Turkmen into the greater Middle Eastern culture. The Turkmenistan region soon came to be known as the capital of Greater Khorasan, when the caliph Al-Ma'mun moved his capital to Merv.[14] Although Turkmenistan was still populated mostly by nomadic herders, permanent settlements were prospering in the fertile river valleys. Farmers raised grains, vegetables, and fruits along the Amu Darya River; and Merv and Nisa became centers of sericulture (the raising of silkworms). A busy caravan route, connecting China and the city of Baghdad (in modern Iraq), passed through Merv. In addition, merchants, traders, and missionaries introduced the religions of Buddhism and Zoroastrianism to the region.[15]

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[13] The five provinces are Akhal, Balkan, Dashoguz, Lebap, and Mary.

[14] *Tarikh* published as Annales, ed. De Gorge, series 2, vol. II, pp. 1243-53 (Arabic text); a cooperative translation project currently published as *The History of al-Tabari* (passages pertaining to this subject in vol. xxiii, pp. 191-201, by M. Hindus).

[15] Svat Soucek, *AHistory of Inner Asia*, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chap. 1, p.49.

Central Asia came under Arab control after a series of invasions in the late7th and early 8th centuries. Meanwhile, the Oguz—the ancestors of the Turkmen—were migrating from eastern Asia into central Asia, the Middle East, and Asia Minor (modern Turkey). The Arab conquest brought the religion of Islam to the Oguz and to the other people of central Asia. In 1040, the Seljuk clan of the Oguz tribe established the Seljuk Empire, with its capital at Merv. At one time, the Seljuk realm stretched all the way to Baghdad. Other Oguz groups moved west across the Caspian Sea, settling in Azerbaijan and in Asia Minor, where they joined the Seljuk Turks in establishing the Ottoman Empire. After mixing with the settled people in Turkmenistan, the Oguz living north of the Kopet-Dag Mountains gradually became known as the Turkmen. In the 11th and 12th centuries, the main centers of Turkmen culture were at Khiva in the north (now in Uzbekistan) and at Merv in the south. Khiva controlled the cities and farming estates of the lower Amu Darya Valley. Merv became a junction of trade in silk and spices between Asia and the Middle East. This business created vast wealth in the ancient city, where the Seljuk rulers built fabulous mosques and palaces. At the same time, a growing class of wealthy traders and landowners was challenging the Seljuks for control of Turkmenistan. It was in 1157 that the revolt of powerful landowners, lead to the collapse of the Seljuk Empire. Consequently, the leaders of Khiva took control of Turkmenistan, but their reign was brief[16]. In 1221, Central Asia suffered a disastrous invasion by Mongol warriors who were sweeping across the region from their base in eastern Asia. Under their commander Genghis Khan, the Mongols conquered Khiva and burned the city of Merv to the ground. The Mongol leader ordered the massacre of Merv's inhabitants as well as the destruction of Turkmenistan's farms and irrigation works. The Turkmen who survived the invasion retreated northward to the plains of Kazakhstan or eastward to the shores of the Caspian Sea. After Chenghis Khan's death in 1227, the Mongols lost control of Turkmenistan.[17] Small, semi-independent states arose under the rule of the

[16] Ibid., p.98.
[17] Ibid., p.107-108.

region's landowners. In the 1370's, the Mongol leader Timur (known as Tamerlane in Europe), a descendant of Genghis Khan, conquered these states once more and established the Timurid Empire but after Timur's death in 1405, the realm weakened and soon disintegrated. The Mongol invasions had divided the Turkmen into small clans and had pushed them into the desert.[18] Later, as the Mongols retreated from Turkmenistan, the Turkmen fell under the control of Muslim khans (rulers) who established khanates in Bukhara (in modern Uzbekistan) and Khiva. The rivalry between the khans and the rulers of Persia touched off centuries of war in Turkmenistan. Persians, Turkmen, and the khans fought for the scattered oases in southern Turkmenistan. From the 14th through the 17th century, Turkmenistan was in decline. To escape the conflicts, most Turkmen moved to the remote deserts along the borders of Persia and Afghanistan.

In the 18th century, after centuries of poverty and isolation, the Turkmen began to rebuild their way of life. The poet Magtymguly created a literary language for the Turkmen and laid the foundations for their modern culture and traditions. Keimir-Ker, a Turkmen from the Tekke clan, led a rebellion of the Turkmen against the Persians, who were occupying most of Turkmenistan. Popular ballads and folk legends still recount the deeds of Keimir-Ker.[19] At this time, the Russian Empire was expanding into central Asia from the plains and forests of Eastern Europe. The Russian czar, Peter the Great, sent the first Russian expeditions into Turkmenistan. Peter was seeking a route for Russian trade with southern Asia and the Middle East. In 1716, however, members of a Turkmen clan murdered the czar's representatives near Khiva. Russia waited for more than a century before sending another mission into Turkmenistan. Nevertheless, trade between Turkmen merchants and Russia continued and was helped by the building of a port on the Caspian Sea at Krasnovodsk, (modern

[18] Ibid., p.124.
[19] Ibid., p.6.

Turkmenbashi).[20] In 1802, members of several Turkmen clans officially became Russian subjects. During the 19th century, the Turkmen also asked for Russia's help during their frequent rebellions against the khans and against the shahs of Persia. The Russians were seeking new markets for their goods, fertile land for the growing of cotton, and access to Turkmenistan's natural resources. As a first step in the conquest of the region, the Russians agreed to provide arms and food to the Turkmen rebels. Russia began sending military expeditions into Turkmenistan in the second half of the 19th century. From 1863 to 1868, Russian armies defeated and annexed the khanates of Bukhara and Khiva. The people of western Turkmenistan, who were seeking independence from the khans, willingly joined the Russian Empire, but the Turkmen of eastern and southern Turkmenistan fiercely resisted Russian annexation.[21] In 1879, at Geok-Tepe near Ashgabat (modern Ashgabat) Turkmen warriors of the Tekke den stopped a large Russian force. Two years later, the Russians besieged Geok-Tepe, eventually capturing it as well as Ashgabat. By 1885, all of the Turkmen clans had submitted to Russian control. The Russians annexed Mary and pushed across Turkmenistan to the borders of Persia and Afghanistan. The building of the Transcaspian Railroad, which connected Krasnovodsk (modern Turkmenbashi), Mary, and trading centers to the east, opened up the region for economic development[22]. From 1890 to 1917, Turkmenistan was part of Russian Turkestan, a province that included central Asia and its Muslim nationalities—the Kazakhs, the Uzbeks, the Kyrgyz, the Tajiks, and the Turkmen. Within Turkestan, however, the Turkmen had a lesser status. Their lands were defined as the Transcaspian Region and were ruled as a military colony. This negligence by Russia's government allowed the Turkmen to maintain their culture, language, and nomadic way of life. In the early 20th century, discontent with czarist rule spread among the people of the Russian Empire which was being drawn into a bloody

[20] Francis Henry Skrine and Edward Denison Ross, Ph.D, *The Heart of Asia,* (Methuen and Co.36 Essex Streek, W.C. London, 1899.), chap.ii, p.240.
[21] Hugo Stumn, *Russia in Central Asia*, Foreign Department Press, 1876, Chap. ii, p. 20-21.
[22] Peter L. Roudik, op cit., p.80.

international conflict. During World War I (1914-1918), the Turkmen and other people of Central Asia moved to reclaim their homelands. A violent uprising broke out in 1916, when the Turkmen, led by Junaid Khan, defeated the Russians at Khiva. The Turkmen established a national government that lasted until 1918[23]. In October 1917, the Communist leader Vladimir Ilich Lenin overthrew the Russian government. The Communists succeeded in taking control of Ashgabat in the summer of 1918. In response, Junaid Khan and forces loyal to the Old Russian regime joined together to drive out the Communists. In July of 1919, these anti-Communist allies established the independent state of Transcaspia. By the fall of 1920, however, the Communist Red Army was advancing from Tashkent (in modern Uzbekistan) and from Bukhara. The Communists gradually subdued Turkmenistan by military occupation and by putting Communist politicians in control of local governments. In 1922, the Communists founded the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)[24]. Two years later; they established the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) as a full member of the USSR.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin made harsh and sweeping changes throughout the USSR. Private property was seized[25], and the Soviet government used brutal methods to punish opposition. These policies sparked a rebellion in Turkmenistan, and in 1927 the Soviets lost control of the republic to a national resistance movement called the Turkmen Freedom[26]. After reclaiming the Turkmen SSR in 1932, Stalin executed thousands of Turkmenistan's Communist leaders—including the president and the premier—whom he accused of helping the nationalists. After the terror of the 1930s, the Communist regime in Ashgabat became completely obedient to the central Soviet government in Moscow. The period 1929-38 was decisive in creating the Soviet institutional system as it stood until 1989. At this time,

[23] Francis Henry Skrine and Edward Denison Ross, Ph.D., op.cit., Chap.V, p.289.
[24] Ibid., p.104.
[25] Ibid., p.105.
[26] Ibid., p.110.

under the leadership of Stalin, who had been building a power base as General Secretary of the Party, the industrialization and collectivization drives were launched. Huge new industries were created and millions of people moved off the land into the towns[27]. At the same time, the scale of repression was massively escalated and millions of people died by execution, in the camps, or of starvation in the villages[28]. Within the Communist Party itself, a series of purges took place that resulted in a massive change in leadership. In these ten years, the size of the state and its bureaucracy expanded enormously, with the biggest growth evident in the institutions responsible for administering the command economy. Meanwhile, another international conflict was brewing in Europe. The western Soviet Union was devastated by World War II (1939-1945), when Germany invaded with a huge military force. Fierce fighting destroyed factories, farms, and cities throughout western Russia and Ukraine. Stalin was clearly unnerved by the loss of life and territory following the Germans' surprise attack. The Soviet Union eventually played the decisive role in defeating the German army, capturing Berlin and occupying most of Eastern Europe that then came under their domination. However, it did so at enormous cost to human life; at least 20 million Soviet citizens died in the effort[29]. In the aftermath of the war, the Soviet political system appeared vindicated: its institutions had managed the war effort and economic growth resumed at high levels by comparison with the capitalist west. Most of the Soviets people seem optimistic about the future prospects for their country, which were reflected in Khrushchev's promise to build communism by the 1980s and stimulated by Soviet advances in space, however, a number of developments combined to shatter this confidence[30].

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27 The rise of Stalin: AD1921–1924". *History of Russia*. History World. http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?HistoryID=ac14&ParagraphID=qxe#qxe. Retrieved 19 Nov. 2010.

28 Abbott Gleason (2009). *A companion to Russian history*. Wiley-Blackwell. p. 373. ISBN 978-1-4051-3560-3. http://books.google.com/?id=JyN0hlKcfTcC&pg=PA373.

29 Geoffrey A. Hosking (2006). *Rulers and victims: the Russians in the Soviet Union*. Harvard University Press. p. 242. ISBN 978-0-674-02178-5. http://books.google.com/?id=CDMVMqDvp4QC&pg=PA242.

30 First, Khrushchev himself revealed the connection between the system and repression. The revelations about Stalin fatally undermined the legitimacy of the regime. Second, there emerged a high degree of institutional conservatism, particularly among the bodies responsible for managing the economy. This

Growing awareness of the crisis in the country helped Mikhail Gorbachev to institute several new policies after coming to power in 1985. Glasnost allowed open criticism of the Communist party and of the country's economic system. Perestroika eased government control over many small businesses, which could now set their own wages, prices, and production schedules. Turkmen Communist leaders, however, were slow to adopt these reforms[31]. Annamurad Khodzhamuradov, who became the Turkmen SSR's leader in 1986, remained loyal to the Soviet government but never accepted Gorbachev's reforms, even the major liberalization movement that shook Russia in the late 1980s made many Soviet republics to gain their independence from Moscow[32]. However, in 1990 the Supreme Soviet of Turkmenistan declared sovereignty as a nationalist response to perceive exploitation by Moscow. Although Turkmenistan was ill prepared for independence and communist leader Saparmurad Niyazov preferred to preserve the Soviet Union, in October 1991 the fragmentation of that entity forced him to call a national referendum that approved independence[33].

When the Soviet Union began to collapse, Turkmenistan and the rest of the Central Asian republics first heavily favored maintaining a reformed version of the state, mainly because they needed the economic power and common markets of the Soviet Union to prosper. Nevertheless, Turkmenistan declared independence on 27 October 1991[34], Albeit one of the last Soviet republics to secede. Turkmenistan gained official recognition in December 25, 1991, a day before the final dissolution of the Soviet Union and joined U.N. the following year. In 1991, it became a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States, an international organization of former Soviet republics. However,

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resulted in declining growth and, alongside this, an increase for corruption. Beginning in the 1970s, the performance of the Western economies, knowledge of which became increasingly available, matched and then passed that of the Soviet Union.

[31] Peter L. Roudik, op.cit., p.140.

[32] Ibid., p.260.

[33] Svat Soucek, op. cit., p.262.

[34] Turkmenistan Reduces Ties To 'Associate Member' Radio Free Europe, 29 August 2005.

Turkmenistan reduced its status in the organization to "associate member" in August 2005. The reason stated by the Turkmen president was the country's policy of permanent neutrality[35]. The former leader of the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic, Saparmurat Niyazov, remained in power as Turkmenistan's leader after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Under his post-Soviet rule, Russian-Turkmen relations greatly suffered. He styled himself as a promoter of traditional[36] Muslim and Turkmen culture (calling himself "Turkmenbaşy," or "leader of the Turkmen people"), but he became notorious in the West for his dictatorial rule and extravagant cult of personality[37]. The extent of his power greatly increased during the early 1990s, and in 1999, he became President for Life[38] until his sudden death on December 21, 2006. Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov was elected the new president with 89% of the vote and 95% turnout on 11 February 2007.

Historical Perspective of Islam in Central Asia

The arrival of Islam in Central Asia is attributed largely to the wars fought between the Arab raiders and the native tribesmen in the third quarter of the seventh century. The year 644 AD marked the beginning of Arab conquests and by the end of the seventh century, most of the Central Asian region had been conquered by the Arabs. Although Islam was not the first monotheist religion to be introduced in Central Asia, it has remained alive in the Central Asian culture since the seventh century AD[39]. Samanids adopted Islam as the official religion in the Samanid state for the first time in the Central Asian region (875-999 A.D). Samanids abolished small city-states and fiefdoms (three Khanates known as Khiva, Kokand, Bukhara) created politically

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[35] Edgar, Adrienne Lynn, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004, p.1.

[36] A tradition is a ritual, belief or object passed down within a society, still maintained in the present, with origins in the past. Common examples include holidays or impractical but socially meaningful clothes (like lawyer wigs or ilitary officer spurs), but the idea has also been applied to social norms such as greetings.

[37] A cult of personality arises when an individual uses mass media, propaganda, or other methods, to create an idealized and heroic public image, often through unquestioning flattery and praise. Cults of personality are usually associated with dictatorships.

[38] President for Life is a title assumed by some dictators to remove their term limit, in the hope that their authority, legitimacy, and term will never be disputed.

[39] Ludmila Polonskaya-Alexei Malashenko, *Islam in Central Asia*, Lebanon, Garnet Publications, 1994, p.4.

centralized state with Bukhara as its capital, Khiva, Kokand and Samarkand as federating units. Bukhara later stood out to be the educational and religious hub of Muslims. It was independent of Baghdad caliphate and was ruled by the local dynasty of the provincial governors.[40]

By the end of the tenth century, Islam occupied an important status in the Samanid state's politics since the Samanid Muslim preachers sought to Islamize nomadic people.[42] Samanids regulated and expanded the Silk Route, which made Bukhara, the Samanid capital, as centre of religious, cultural and trade activities. Samanids incorporated religion into politics and set a new trend of using religion and language as instruments for exerting and spreading political influence. As the local people of this region were familiar with Persia, the Samanid rulers found it easier to administer the dynasty through use of Persian language.[41]

The Samanid Empire ended by the year 999 AD. with the arrival of the catalyst Turkic tribes (Ghaznavids-Qarakhanids). Subsequently, the Seljuks defeated them and established their dominance all over the Central Asian region. Islam neither dilapidated nor flourished under these rulers. With the lessening of the significance of the land route that linked Central Asia to the outer world because of the regulation of sea routes to India, Europe and Africa, the advent of the seventeenth century brought the decline of Silk Route trade dramatically[42]. The decline of trade led to the decrease in income of these states and meant that Central Asian rulers lost the capability of keeping large standing armies to keep their influence and expand their kingdoms. Islamic clergy who had tremendous influence over the life of a common man impeded innovations in education and social life, as they thought innovations and modernization as anti-Islamic traditions. In mosques, preaching of these clerics through prayer sermons depicted this trend evidently, as the common people spent their lives

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[40] Ibid. p.10.
[41] Ibid. p.11.
[42] Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad, The rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, Lahore, Vanguard Books, 2002, p.21.

according to teachings of these clerics. This trend further marginalized and isolated Central Asia from the rest of the developing world.

Subsequent years marked the rise of Shaybani dynasty (1451-1510 AD). As a result of the events that marked the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century, the Shabayni dynasty that upheld Islam as their supreme religion, gradually degenerated into city-based fiefdoms. In the eighteenth century, three Khanates (fiefdoms) ruled by the patriarchs called Khans emerged[43]. Islam as depicted by Islamic clergy survived in those days and the common man relied on clergy for religious guidance more than on Quran.[44]

In the mid of 1860s, the Russian considerations to take Central Asia into the fold of Russian empire were made imperative by the fact that the cutting off of the US cotton supplies for the Russian factories had brought the Russian industrial cycle to a halt. Central Asia in this situation provided the best cotton raw material. On the other hand, the Russian empire did not want to lose this region in the critical era of the Great Game, when Great Britain and Russian empires wanted to outmaneuver each other. Russia felt consistently threatened from the expansion of British Empire towards Afghanistan that could lead to Central Asia[45].

Islam during the Period of Tsars

During the period between 1865 and 1876, the Russian Tsars captured Tashkent and rest of the Uzbek areas. The Tsarist army also subjugated Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, however, the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan were kept open. The bandits (Islamic revolutionists) and the tribal chiefs often took refuge in each other's territories[46]. Islam in Central Asia became less diverse and dynamic not because of the reason that new Russian

[43] Ibid.p.23.
[44] Ibid. p.23
[45] Ibid. p.24.
[46] Peter Hopkrick, "*The great game"*, Oxford, 1990 history of civilization of Central Asia.

rulers imposed restrictions on Islam, but due to the fact that Russians gave the Muslim ultra-conservative clerics incentives of modernized life, health, education and industrial benefits to enhance coherence between the new masters and the ruled ones[47]. The new Russian rulers got only partly successful as the incorporation of the modern way of life and Western ideas gave way to modern interpretation of Islam known as Usul-e-Jadida or Jadidism (new educational principles). Jadidism was one of the intellectual Islamic movements, which swept over the colonized Muslim world in the late nineteenth century[48]. Jadidism remained an intellectual rather than a popular movement. Cleavages in the movement, due to ideological and political differences, hindered the way of progress of this movement. The Jadids also joined the communist party after 1917, and helped in building indigenous communist parties, but it did not benefit them as expected. When Stalin came to power, he termed the Jadids as the Bourgeois reformers who in thousands were later brutally eliminated in the purge of 1937[49].

Islam under the Bolshevik Rule

The Bolshevik Revolution engulfed Central Asia in 1917, by establishing Bolshevik rule over the entire region. The Bolsheviks found Central Asia as deeply fragmented and highly politicized region with anti-Russian feelings put ablaze by the Islamic clerics. In 1917, the Bolsheviks awarded the right of self-determination to the local ethnic national groups[50]. Sacred Islamic monuments, books and things pillaged by the Tsars were returned to the mosques. The days of Muslim celebrations were declared to be the legal holidays throughout Central Asia. An equivalent court system was formed in 1921, with Islamic courts rendering justice in harmony with Sharia laws. A special Sharia Commission was established in the Soviet Commissariat of Justice. Some Sharia sentences that contravened Soviet law, such as stoning or the cutting off

[47] Ahmed Rashid, op.cit., p.24.
[48] Ahmed Rashid, op.cit., p.24-25.
[49] 'Central Asia: Jadidism-Old Tradition Of Renewal', www.rferl.org/featuresarticle.html
[50] Ahmed Rashid, op.cit., p.31.

of hands, were forbidden. Decisions of the Sharia courts that concerned these matters had to be confirmed by higher organs of justice. A corresponding education system was also established. In 1922, rights to certain "Waqf"[51] (religious bequest) properties were restored to Muslim administration, with the condition that they would be used for education only. As a result, the system of madarsahs (religious schools) was established. In 1925, there were 1,500 madarsahs with 45,000 students in the Caucasus state of Dagestan, as opposed to just 183 state schools. In contrast, by November 1921, 1,000 Soviet schools had some 85,000 pupils in Central Asia. The Muslim Commissariat in Moscow oversaw Russia's policy towards Islam. Muslims with few communist qualifications were given leading positions in the Commissariat. The result was the division of the Islamic movement. Majority of Muslim leaders aided the Soviets, persuaded by the fact that Soviet power meant religious liberty. There was serious discussion generated among Muslim population about the similarity of Islamic values to the socialist principles. Popular slogans of the time included: "Long live Soviet power, long live the Sharia, religion, freedom and national independence!"[52]. It quickly became apparent to the Muslims in Central Asia that the right of self-determination given by Bolsheviks was only used as an instrument to win support from millions of non-Russians particularly Muslims. The Bolsheviks made alliances with the Kazakh pan-Islamic group, the Ush-Zhuz which joined the Communist Party in 1920[53]. The Basmachi revolts (Islamic movement)[54] which started during the years of the Bolshevik resistance to the Russian Tsarist rule never died and remained alive in the social undercurrents of Central Asian republics against all Bolshevik efforts.

The Stalinist Repression

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51 Ibid., p. 32.
52 Waqf: term used for property devoted to Islamic teaching, mosques, and Muslim orphanages.
53 Dave Crouch, "Socialists can learn from how the Bolsheviks approached the Muslims of the Russian empire", www.lpi.org.uk
54 Ibid.,

Stalin became the Secretary General of the Soviet Communist Party in 1922[55]. Whilst the Basmachi revolts still stayed alive across the Central Asian region, Stalin decided to disband the "bandits" to suppress unrest in the region. The last of the Basmachi revolts was finally crushed in 1929, in Tajikistan. Many Basmachi leaders with their thousands of followers fled to Afghanistan. Stalin consequently re-drew the map of Turkistan and divided the region into five socialist republics with well-defined demarcated borders. Demarcation was not done according to the geographical or ethnic considerations; main purpose was the consolidation of the Russian rule and suppression of opposition in the region[56]. Socialist bearings were imposed with full thrust on all spheres of life in Central Asia in 1929. The Stalinist regime embarked on oppressive methods for the introduction of Atheism in Central Asia.[57] Having consolidated the power; the Soviets launched castigatory campaigns against all religious forces present in the new Communist Russia. Islam was particularly beleaguered because it was thought to be the most conservative and reactionary of all religions. They depicted Islam as "mullah" (Islamic cleric) led force that was suspected to be supported and financed by the British imperialists trying to impede the way of Socialism.[58] In this era of Socialist repression; mosques were locked or converted into workshops. Women were forbidden to dress up according to Islamic traditions and Islamic teachings were banned. In Soviet empire, only four thousand mosques were operative in 1929. Despite harsh crushing and even physical annihilation of a great part of the religious institutions, Islam, clan and local traditions were preserved in Central Asia through Makallahs (part of village-indigenous community).[59] This remained the basic units of social structure of Central Asia and still retains its influence today. Makallahs had mosques that were operated as centers of Islamic education. However, these mosques had been operating covertly since the

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55 Basmachi: A Turkic term that means bandit used by Soviets for revolts and Islamic mujahideen who opposed the communist system in central Asia after 1917.

56 *Joseph Stalin - Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stalin

57 Ahmad Rashid, op.cit., p.36

58 Ludmila Polonskaya-Alexei Malashenko, op.cit., p.92.

59 Ahmad Rashid,op.cit., p.38.

1920s.[60] Makallahas remained the centers of Islamic education throughout Central Asia even during the Stalinist rule. Paradoxically, the situation improved for Muslims in Central Asia as Hitler invaded Soviet Union in 1941. Stalin appeased the Muslims of Central Asia, as he needed people to fight the war for Soviet Union and set up four directorates to mobilize and control the Muslims of Central Asian states simultaneously. Central Asian region also benefited from the industrial development as the industrial infrastructure was shifted from Soviet main land to the Central Asian land.[61]

Khrushev's Liberalisation of Religion

The brief period during (1955-1958) marked the slight relaxation of astringent Soviet policies. Khrushev adopted this policy to liberalize Stalin's harsh political structure, seeking to gain support for the Soviet policies in the Muslim world by showing tolerance towards Islam within its own territory. Islamic schools were established in Tashkent and Bukhara, where Islamic clerics were trained to synthesize Islam and Socialism. Muslim high-ranking clerics were brought from Islamic countries as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Morocco to Tashkent to certify the compatibility of Islam with socialism.[62]

Gorbachev's Policy towards Islam

President Mikhail Gorbachev in mid-1980s promulgated the policy of restructuring, called "Perestroika." Perestroika comprised of a set of strategies aimed at liberalization of political and social policies. This set of policies did not include the lifting of constraints from religious practices but the people of Central Asia interpreted this slight lift of ban as an opportunity to revitalize their religious practices.[63] As a result, Central Asian citizens showed deep interest in Islam. Thousands of mosques were built and Islamic literature was brought in from all over the Islamic world. The Islamic reading material was

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60 Makallah: Tajik word meaning part of hometown, village-essential part of social network.
61 Ludmila Polonskaya-Alexei Malashenko,op.cit., p.96.
62 Ahmed Rashid, op.cit.p.38.
63 Ibid., p.39.

distributed among the population by the itinerant clerics[64] who became public orators and prayer leaders in these Makhallas.[65] The main reason for this instant bent of the population towards Islam was that Islam never relinquished its appeal even during the era of the severest Soviet oppression. The survival of Islam in Central Asia is attributed to the strong ethnic Islamic traditions and the external support of the Muslim and the Western hemisphere to keep Islam alive during the Soviet rule. The itinerant Islamic clerics and the Sufi societies that operated in a covert manner contributed enormously to the survival of Islam in this period. The well-organized Sufi societies published and distributed Islamic literature. Even within the local Communist parties in Central Asia, some native Muslim Communist leaders hired mullahs and the Sufis to perform the Islamic rituals. Women also played a leading role in keeping the Islamic traditions alive at home. Moreover, they maintained the prayer places. Women also facilitated to keep the shrine praying regulated.[66]

Roots of Islamic Resurgence in Central Asia

The Afghan war and the Soviet disintegration in the year 1990 had a long lasting impact over the Central Asian states, politics and religion. In 1980s, thousands of Central Asians were recruited in the Red Army to fight the Afghan Islamist warriors. Consequently, the Central Asians were introduced to the wider Muslim concepts and Muslim brethren. Despite the fact that Central Asian Muslim soldiers were brought to fight for their Communist masters against their co-religionists they got deeply impressed by the devotion of the Afghan Mujahideen towards Islam. A large number of Central Asian soldiers who were taken as prisoners of war were indoctrinated and joined Mujahideen.[67] Thousands of these Islamists studied in Islamic madarsahs spread on Pakistan's territory. The Muslims began to envisage a fight beyond the Afghan borders as Islamists running madrasahs started planning to reserve

[64] Ibid., p.42.
[65] Mullah: Islamic cleric
[66] Ahmad Rashid, op.cit., p.43.
[67] Ibid., p.41.

places for Central Asian Islamists, who received education and living allowances. These Islamists entered Pakistan in droves without any visas and passports.[68] The strengthening of Islamism in Central Asia is mainly attributed towards the Islamists infiltration from Afghanistan into Tajik and Uzbek territories. This became particularly evident in 1985 as movements for recognition of right of self-determination triggered up in Soviet republics. This was further accelerated by an overall worsening of the Soviet economic system.[69] After the Soviet disintegration, in the absence of political control and weak social infrastructure, Islam proved to be a unifying force for the Central Asian societies.

Disintegration of the Soviet Union and its Impact on Central Asian States

The end of the Soviet rule caught the Central Asians by surprise. The Central Asian leaders reluctantly viewed the independence from Soviet rule as an unwanted blessing. Central Asia stood connected to Moscow by strong communication, transport and administrative network. Therefore, its centuries old ties with Russia could not be broken instantly due to demarcation of new borders. The presidents of five newly incepted Central Asian States met in Ashkabad, Turkmenistan, on the eve of December 12, 1991, to formulate a strategy to cope with the new transition that their nations were faced with. The Minsk Treaty which disbanded Soviet Union had not even been presented to the Central Asian leaders for consultation.[70] Central Asian leaders faced the fears of running independent states; problems of inflation, security and foreign policy among others. The leaders embarked on policies of political suppression and media censorship as the only solution to counter the growing domestic problems of these states.[71] Few democrats in Central Asia looked up to Russia for political inspiration and Central Asian youth drew inspiration from Muslim states for new ideological guidance. The reinforcement of Islam in Central Asia

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[68] Ibid., p.32.
[69] Wikipeadia (2010), "Mujahideen". Retrieved jan 12, 2010 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mujahideen#Afghan_Mujahedeen.
[70] Ludmila Polonskaya-Alexei Malashenko, op.cit., p.121.
[71] Ahmad Rashid, op.cit., p.47.

was enhanced by absence of any religious and political system. This gave way to the strengthening of ethnic ties and anti-Russian sentiments. Among the politically and economically dissatisfied youth, teachings in madarsahs ingrained the spirit of conservatism and aggressiveness towards un-Islamic political system. Natural antagonism towards modernization and democratic ideals was also developed. The students of these madarsahs raised popular support winning slogans such as "building the caliphate", or justice and equal opportunities for all; these slogans praised the importance of Islamic economic system as a remedy to all poverty-related problems. Central Asian States adopted the policy of Secular-neutrality and the stance of steering their policies without any religious or ethnic influences. Orthodox Islam in Central Asia was incorporated with politics in early 1990s and at first, this phenomenon showed itself in Tajikistan. There are three basic reasons for this, the first being the collapse of official communist ideology and its associated security system. Second is the growth of national self-consciousness in which historical and cultural roots are often linked to religion. Third are the socio-economic setbacks that have accompanied the transition from centrally controlled economic system to free-market economic system. Moreover, Islam has been used by various factions of Central Asian societies to determine their influence in their states and gain benefits.'[72] Turkmen populace comprises of 89 % of Muslim population and 9 % of Eastern Orthodox people. Turkmen President, Suparmurat Niyazov, has often stressed on the official stance of Turkmen government that is based on "secularist isolationism." The country has seen a steady growth of Islamic trends among the masses despite strict government regulations and policies, aimed at restricting the Islamic groups operations in the country. President Niyazov, said in a statement, "We have firmly proclaimed the principle that Turkmenistan is a secular state. We have no grounds to think that someone intends to change this principle."[73] Another

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[72] Ibid., p.53.

[73] Shukhrat Yovkochev -Rich Hawkins, "*The Politization of Islam in Uzbekistan: Before and After Independence*", http/birliknet/page-18.uk.

government statement asserted the, "inadmissibility of interference of religion in organizational and state affairs."[74]

The Kazakh population is an ethnic mix of Russians and Muslims in equal proportions. The ruling elite led by Nursultan Nazarbayev is dominantly inclined towards Western ideologies and socio-political trends.[75] Unlike the rest of the Central Asian States, Nazarbayev created a separate "muftiate" (council of religious clerics) for Kazakhstan. The 1993 constitution clearly identifies Kazakhstan as a secular state, forbidding religious parties in any form in the state territory.[76]

The Kyrgyz population comprises of Sunni Muslims who practice Islam according to their tribal traditions. The Soviet rule only had trivial effect over the Islamic traditions and way of life.[77] Islam has not been a vital factor of Kyrgyz politics and the state constitution preamble clearly describes Kyrgyzstan as secular state and restraints the incursion of any religion and ideology into state constitution.[78] In Kyrgyzstan, primarily in the cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad as well as in Batken, a number of Islamist groups named were trying to secure official registration with the Justice Ministry.[79]

Tajik population has 85% Sunni Muslims and 10% belong to Shiite faction. Islam had played a vital role in Tajik politics in 1990's. The incursion of mass political Islamic groups in political mainstream urged the Communist party of Tajikistan to take into consideration the Islamic heritage of Central Asian States. The Tajik opposition wanted to depict Islam as a destabilizing factor for the existent regime, but the Imam Ali Rahmonov regime has shown inclination towards the Iranian version of Islam and has refuted the Tajik opposition

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74 Library of Congress, "*Turkmen religion and culture*", http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan
75 Aleksei Malashenko, Islam and Politics in Central Asian States, CA&CC Press AB Publishing House (Sewden), May 3, 1994, http://www.ca-c.org/dataeng/02.malash.shtml
76 Aleksei Malashenko, op.cit. p.98.
77 "Islam and state-Kazakhstan", http://countrystudies.us/kazakstan
78 "Kyrgyz religion", http://countrystudies.us/kyrgyzstan
79 Ibid.,

allegations.[80] 1992–97 civil war made Islam an important force in Tajik society and strengthened it within the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). Today the (UTO), which is considered to be a moderate Islamist force, is cooperating with the Tajik government in accordance with the peace agreement of June 1997.[81]

Uzbekistan remained hub of economic activity and political power during the Soviet rule. The Soviets made Uzbekistan the biggest cotton-producing region of the Soviet empire. Bukhara and Samarkand remained centers of cultural heritage and Islamic education for centuries. Islamic schools remained operative in these areas and anti-communist movements also originated at these schools. The incumbent Uzbek President Islam Karimov has pursued the policy of crushing opposition groups right from the time of inception of Uzbekistan in 1990.Uzbekistan has seen steady growth of political cum religious groups. Erk, Birlik Haq Parasti, Hizb-u-Tahrir and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan are prominent political parties.

Advent of Islam in Turkmenistan

The Turkmen of Turkmenistan, like their kin in Uzbekistan and Afghanistan, are mostly Sunni Muslims with a microscopic percentage of Shia Muslims. Although the great majority of Turkmen readily identify themselves as Muslims and acknowledge Islam as an integral part of their cultural heritage, many support a revival of the religion's status primarily as an element of national revival. Turkmen usually do not attend Mosque regularly or demonstrate their adherence publicly, except through participation in officially sanctioned national traditions associated with Islam on a popular level, including life-cycle events such as weddings, burials, and pilgrimages.[82]

Islam came to Turkmenistan during the Muslim conquest of the region under the caliphate of Hazrat Umar Farooq (RA) and Hazrat Uthman Gani (RA),

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80 Aleksei Malashenko,op.cit., p.97.
81 "U.S. Library of Congress-Religion", http://countrystudies.us/tajikistan
82 Saodat Olimova, "*Political Islam and Conflict in Tajikistan*", www.ca-c.org

however the process of expansion and consolidation of Islam in the region was made possible by the tireless efforts of Sufi Sheikhs. Being God fearing and men of understanding, critical in the process of reconciling Islamic beliefs with pre-Islamic belief systems, Sufis often were recognized as "patron saints" of particular clan or tribe.[83] However, the repressive policies of Soviets regarding the propagation, expansion and consolidation of Islam in the region made all sizeable and influential institutes irrelevant. During the Soviet rule, all religious beliefs were attacked by the communist authorities as superstition and "vestiges of the past". Most of the religious schools and religious observances were banned, thousands of mosques were closed, and many signs of the Muslim religion were made illegal.[84] An official Muslim Board of Central Asia, with its headquarter in Tashkent, was established during the 2nd world war to supervise Islam in Central Asia. For the most part, the Muslim Board functioned as an instrument of propaganda whose activities did little to enhance the Muslim cause.[85] Atheist introduction stifled the religious development and contributed to the isolation of Turkmen from the international Muslim community. Some religious customs such as, burial and male circumcision continued to be practiced throughout the Soviet period but most of the religious beliefs, knowledge and customs were preserved only in rural areas in "folk from"[86] as a kind of "unofficial Islam"[87] which was not sanctioned by the state.[88] By 1960s, the Soviet regime realized that Islam could not be entirely eradicated from

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83 Larry Clark, Michael Thurman, and David Tyson. "Turkmenistan". *A Country Study: Turkmenistan* (Glenn E. Curtis, editor).

84 Integrated within the Turkmen tribal structure is the "holy" tribe called *ovlat* . Ethnographers consider the *ovlat,* of which six are active, as a revitalized form of the ancestor cult injected with Sufism. According to their genealogies, each tribe descends from the Prophet Muhammad through one of the Four Caliphs. Because of their belief in the sacred origin and spiritual powers of the *ovlat* representatives, Turkmen accord these tribes a special status. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the *ovlat* tribes became dispersed in small, compact groups in Turkmenistan. They attended and conferred blessings on all important communal and life-cycle events, and also acted as mediators between clans and tribes. The institution of the *ovlat* retains some amount of authority even today as well. Many of the Turkmen who are revered for their spiritual powers trace their lineage to an *ovlat,* and it is not uncommon, especially in rural areas, for such individuals to be present at life-cycle and other communal celebrations.

85 Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay, (1968), *l'Islam en Union sovietique,* Paris:Payot. p.183.

86 Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay, C, (1978), 'Muslim Religious Conservatism and dissent' *Religion in Communist Lands*, 6, III, p.154.

87 Folk religion consists of ethnic or regional religious customs under the umbrella of an organized religion, but outside of official doctrine and practices.

88 Unofficial Islam designates those activities of Soviet Muslims that take place outside of the control of the four Spiritual Directorates. Most of the activities that are considered unofficial Islam seems to be just basic Islamic ceremonies such as prayers etc.

Central Asia for domestic as well as political reasons, Moscow established "official Islam"[89] allowing the functioning of a handful of state-controlled mosques and religious schools. Similarly, the regime permitted a small number of Muslims to make the annual Hajj pilgrimage to Makah.[90] Even before Soviet occupation of Central Asian lands, the population was subjected to oppression and torture by the Amirs but was left alone to practice their age-old customs and religion, while radical Islam spread elsewhere in the Arab World, Central Asia was kept out of its influence by the Iron curtain. It was not until the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1991 that most of the Central Asian people became aware of these ideas and ideologies because the most widely practiced form of Islam in Central Asia was traditional Sufism, which placed stress on mysticism, music, poetry and tolerance and did not subject women to severe constraints.[91] Thus, even under Soviet rule in Central Asia, adherence to Islam continued as a covert activity with local Communist party chiefs deliberately turning a blind eye to private observance of Islam.

Turkmenistan became independent on October 26, 1991, amidst the dissolution of the Soviet Union.[92] At the time of independence, the former head of Turkmenistan's communist party, Saparmurad Niyazov, was elected president of the newly independent nation in an uncontested election. The authoritarian, Niyazov, assumed the title "*Turkameabashi",* or "Leader of all Turkmen*"* but was accused of developing a totalitarian cult of personality. His opus, the *Ruhnama,*[93] was a mandatory reading in Turkmenistan's schools (which is still taught there), renaming months and the days of the week by introduction of the new Turkmen calendar.[94] This in fact, demonstrates his concern for Islam and Islamic literature. Besides, opposition parties were banned in Turkmenistan and

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89 Rakowska- Harmstone, (1983), 'Islam and Nationalism: Central Asia and Kazakhstan under Russian Rule', Central Asian Survey, 2, II: 7-87, p.53.

90 Official Islam means the Muslim Spiritual Directorates and the legally sanctioned body of ulama.

91 Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay, (1968), op. cit., p.183.

92 Carrered Encausse, (1960), 'Les suivances pre-Islamiques chez les Musulmanes de l'URSS', *Cahiers du Monde russe et sovietique,* 12, II: p.21.

93 Habeeb, William Mark "Chapter 3: The history" i*n Turkmenistan*, Philadelphia, Mason Crest, 2005, pp. 25-48.

94 The spirit-book of Turkmen written by Turkmenbashi.

the government controlled all sources of information. The leaders of Central Asian states differ on how to govern their traumatized people. Although they were coming from the old communist system but they were of the same kind; having authoritative, and with little tolerance to democracy. Over the years, leaders like Saparmurad Niyazov (Turkmenistan), Islam Karimov (Uzbekistan), Nursultan Nazarbeyey (Kazakhstan), have turned out to be power-hungry politicians who have bestowed upon themselves vast powers, intolerant to criticism and opposition.[95] After assuming power, the first secretary of communist party of Turkmenistan, Saparmurad Niyazov, disbanded the party and changed its name to Turkmenistan Democratic Party, became a democrat and proclaimed Turkmenistan a secular state.[96] The current government oversees "official Islam" through a structure inherited from the Soviet period. Turkmenistan Muslim Religious Board, together with that of Uzbekistan, constitutes the Religious Board of *Mavarannahr* situated in Tashkent, exerts considerable influence in appointments of religious leaders in Turkmenistan. The governing body of Islamic judges (*Qaziat*) is registered with the Turkmenistan ministry of justice and a council of religious affairs under the cabinet ministers monitors activities of clergy. Those who wish to become members of the official clergy are required to attend official religious institutions; a few, however, may prove their qualification simply by taking an examination.[97] According to 1995 census, ethnic Turkmen constituted 77% of the population who were predominantly Sunni Muslims. Although the great majority of Turkmen readily identify themselves as Muslim and acknowledge

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[95] The months of May (*Makhtumkuli*), June (*Oguz*), July (*Gorkut*), August (*Alp Arslan*) and November (*Sanjar*) were named after thpopular historical heroes of the Turkmen while January (*Turkmenbashi*) and April (*Gurbansoltan*) were named after the contemporary heroes, Turkmenbashi and his mother. Once March (*Nowruz*) was reserved for marking the traditional spring celebrations, the basic elements of the ideology were symbolized in the remaining months of February (*Baydak*; 'flag'), September (*Ruhnama*), October (*Garaşsyzlyk*; 'independence') and December (*Bytaraplyk*; 'neutrality'). The new names for the days of the week were relatively less ideologized except a particular reference to *Ruhnama* by renaming Saturday as the *Ruhgun,* the "spirit day". Other days of the week were renamed as *Dynçgun* (Sunday; the 'rest day'), *Başgün* (Monday; the 'initial day'), *Yaşgun* (Tuesday; the 'young day'), *Hoşgun* (Wednesday; the 'favorable day'), *Sogapgun* (Thursday; the 'justice day') and *Annagun* (Friday; the 'Anna-day').

[96] Helsinki Watch, *Human Rights in Turkmenistan* (New York: Helsinki Watch, July 1993), p.1.

[97] Article 1, *Constitution of Turkmenistan.*

Islam as an integral part of their cultural heritage, many are non-believers and support revival of the religion as an element of national revival. They do not attend mosque services or demonstrate their religious adherence publicly, except through participation in officially sanctioned national traditions associated with Islam on a popular level.[98]

Since 1990, efforts have been made to regain some of the cultural heritage lost under Soviet rule, president Niyazov has ordered that basic Islamic principles must be taught in public schools. A good number of religious institutions including religious schools and mosques have been established with the active support of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Turkey. As a practice of Abbasid regime, religious classes are held in both the schools and mosques, the subjects like Qu'ran, *Hadith* and the history of Islam are being taught on regular basis by scholars of excellence in Arabic language.[99]

With a view to satisfy the wishes of the population, Turkmenistan government has allowed a modest, state-sponsored and tightly controlled revival of Islam since independence. As against four mosques operating during the Soviet era, there are an estimated 318 mosques open for Muslims now.[100] Nevertheless, mosque-based Islam does not play a dominant role in the society, partly due to 70 years of Soviet rule and partly because of the country's indigenous religious culture. Traditionally, Turkmen express Islam more through rituals associated with birth, marriage, death and through pilgrimage to the tombs of Saints, rather than through regular attendance at a mosque.[101] Though there is no state religion, the government has incorporated some aspects of Islamic tradition with a view to redefine a national identity. In order to ensure that foreign Islamic movements do not spread into the country, the government exercises strict control and restricts access to Islamic education since 1997, and mosque

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[98] *Muslim Board of Mawaraunnahr, its Activities and Aims,* Dialogue Today, Vol. VIII, No. 3, Delhi,1994.
[99] *Religion of Turkmenistan:* Wikipedia encyclopedia, p.1.
[100] Larry Clark, Michael Thurman, and David Tyson. "Turkmenistan". *A Country Study: Turkmenistan* (Glenn E. Curtis, editor), (March 1996).
[101] 'Central Asia: Islam and the State', ICG Asia Report, No. 59, 10 oct. 2010, at http://www.crisigroup.org.

based Imams are restricted to teach Islam.[102] Criticizing the expansion of the network of Islamic schools, president Niyazov ordered in June, 2001, the closure of Zamakshri *Madrasas* in Dashoguaz,[103] leaving the theological faculty at Turkmen State University in Ashgabat as the only remaining government centre for Islamic education but there remained no religious instruction in public schools.[104] Moreover, it was mandatory for all the children in the public schools and institutions of higher learning to study Ruhnama (president Niyazov's spiritual guide book which is still taught there), on Turkmen culture heritage.

The government stresses its secular nature and support of freedom of religious belief as embodied in the 1991 Law, on freedom of conscience, on religious organizations in Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic and institutionalized the same in 1992 constitution. That document guarantees the separation of church and state; it also removes any legal basis for Islam to play a role in political life by prohibiting the dissemination of "unofficial" religious literature, discrimination based on religion, and the formation of religious political parties. In addition, the government reserves the right to appoint and dismiss anyone who teaches religious matters or who is a member of clergy.[105] The serious mistreatment of some minority religious members continued which began in 2003 and was extended to the Muslim community. In March 2004, Turkmenistan's popular and respected Mufti, Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah, was secretly tied and sentenced to 22 years imprisonment, reportedly for his alleged role in a failed 2002 coup plot. He has been dismissed as Mufti in 2003, reportedly for his refusal to teach the president's book, *Ruhnama*, as a sacred text. Since independence, the Islamic leadership in Turkmenistan has been

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102 Anara Tabyshalieva, 'Central Asia: polarisation of regional committees', Paper prepared for the Center for Political and Strategic Studies, June 1997—as appears on the NEXIS database.
103 Jean-Christophe Peuch, "Turkmenistan: Leader tightens grip on unofficial Islam", RFE/RL, 28 June 2010, www.rferl/org.
104 International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, "Religious Intolerance in Selected OSCE Countries in 2000", report to the Seminar on Freedom of Religion or Belief in the OSCE Region, The Hague, 29 June 2010, p. 28, available at: www.ihf-hr.org
105 U.S. Department of State, *2001 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom*.

more assertive but in large part, it responds to government control.[106] The official governing body of religious judges gave its official support to president Niyazov in June 1992 elections.

On the other hand, some Muslim leaders are opposed to the secular concept of government and especially to a government controlled by former communists. Some official leaders and teachers working outside the official structure have vowed to increase the knowledge of Islam, to increase Islam's role in society, and broaden adherence to its tenets. Alarmed that such activism may aggravate tensions between Sunnis and Shiites and especially alienate Orthodox slaves; the government has drawn up plans to elevate the council of religious affairs to ministry status and regulate religious activities more tightly. In the beginning of 1998, the Turkmen government expelled almost all missionaries and all religious activities have been highly repressed. House meetings of any kind are prohibited and people found attending secret religious meetings risk losing their job and home too. The Turkmen intelligence services carefully watch those known to be believers as well as foreigners.[107] Turkmenistan has one of the most oppressive regimes of the world. The former president instituted a bizarre personality cult.[108] He erected gold plated statues of himself all over the country and his portrait hung in every public room and on every public building. He wrote a book called *Ruhnama*, which rules much of the daily life. Consequently, an entire generation has undergone extensive brain washing.[109] The new president, Gurbanguly Berdymuhamedov, has promised to continue Niyazov's political heritage. Schoolchildren are still required to memorize portions of the former president's book, *Ruhnama*. There is no critical voice or opposition allowed in the country, the government continues to control all

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106 Glen Curtis, ed, *Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan: Country Studies* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996), p.137.

107 Nissman, David, "Iran and Soviet Islam", *Central Asian Survey* (Oxford: Society for Central Asian Studies, December 1983), pp. 45-60.

108 Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Turkmenistan", *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), pp.186-187. Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights Watch WorldReport, 1993* (New York: Human Rights), p.240.

109 S Blagov, 'Turkmenistan's President-for-Life Slated as Destabilising', *Asia Times*, 6 January 2000.

media.[110] Islam in Central Asia in general, and Turkmenistan in particular has to confront different stages in the process of its development. Earlier during the Soviets Islam as a religion was marginalized in so far its role and influence on common masses was concerned. After independence, it was expected, Islam with its whole system will re-emerge on the scenario of Turkmenistan. Niyazov, the president of the country initially proved all-liberal by providing administrative support regarding the teaching of Islamic principles at school, establishing Mosques at large scale in the region, however being a former communist leader, with the passage of time he pursued the footsteps of his predecessors.

Methodology

In order to have a meaningful discourse on the subject, interdisciplinary approach has been followed taking insight from history, geography, cultural anthropology, economics, political science and philosophy. The comparative methods were also employed for the understanding of different issues related to the subject. Since the study is based on theoretical and historical study as such all sources of information, books, official records, journals, periodicals, newspapers etc. were taken into account. Although enough of literature on the nature of State and Islam in Turkmenistan is not available, an attempt has been made to evaluate the available data with an objective analysis. Hardly any compact research work has been carried out on the history of Islam in Turkmenistan both in *Soviet* and *in Post Soviet* period, even the little studies related to Turkmenistan cover only disjointed and limited areas touching mainly general information. The present study therefore aims to fill up the gaps and present an objective analysis of the State and Islam in Turkmenistan (1991-2001).

Objectives

[110] Akhmet Salamov, .Sotsialnaya osnova., op., cit., p.27.

Keeping in view the importance and significance of the assigned work, following objectives have been formulated to ensure the objectivity and impartiality in the work:

- To look into the details that led to the independent character of Turkmenistan, record the religiosity of the region, and the role of socio-religious institutions in strengthening the mutual bonds and relations.
- To evaluate socio-political conditions of the region with special reference to the Soviet's attitude towards Islam till the collapse of USSR.
- To study the nature and pattern of government in Turkmenistan before and after the independence of the country.
- To highlight the government and state policies in the promotion of religious knowledge and institutions in the region.
- To work out the constitutional pattern with special reference to religion, freedom of expression, education, and health care, etc. Besides, the role of prominent political parties and the scope of Islamic parties in the formation of government would be also dealt in the chapter.

Chapter Scheme

In order to complete, the assigned work in an objective and analytical manner, the Dissertation has been divided into three chapters besides introduction and conclusion.

The Introductory part of the dissertation throws light on geographical features and ethnic composition of Turkmenistan which include Uzbeks, Russians and other smaller minorities like Kazakhs, Azeris, Armenians, Ukrainians, Balochis, Koreans and Tatars for the general comprehension and understanding of the region. Since several Empires ruled Turkmenistan which begins with Achaemenid Empire of ancient Persia up to Mikhail Gorbachev. The chapter therefore is an attempt to highlight the historicity of the region with regard to the different rulers. After independence, Niyazov became the first president and ruled throughout his life. The chapter therefore is a humble beginning to spell

out the contribution Niyazov made in different stratas of society. Islam was first introduced into Transoxiana (modern Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) in the 2nd half of the seventh century AD. Chapter therefore is an attempt to highlight the history of Islam in Central Asia in general and Turkmenistan in particular with a brief preface on the position of Islam and Muslims during the Soviet regime. Since Soviets had negative attitude towards Islam, religious institutions and Muslims who had to bear the brunt of religious persecution , right up to the collapse of USSR, as such the chapter has been analytically studied which include the description and pattern of government in Turkmenistan even after Independence.

Chapter 2nd of the Dissertation deals with the socio-religious milieu of Turkmenistan. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to highlight the Socio-religious conditions of the region with special reference to Socio-cultural conditions, religion, customs and traditions of the area. This chapter also throws light on education, economy and social events. Prior to Soviet rule, the extended family was the basic and most important social and economic unit among the Turkmen. Although soviet power brought about fundamental changes in the family structure but many traditional aspects remain alive. Turkmen society is basically patriarchal in which the authority belongs to eldest male of the extended family. Therefore, attention has been paid to identify the status of family, as an institution that includes gender issues, elder's role, role of women, marriage and divorce. With regard to religion, a brief description of all religions and a detailed account of Islam and its practices are also included in the chapter. Villages and communities are ruled by Majilis or council made up of male leaders of prominent families. Local Mullah's (community heads) have a prominent role to play in resolving the women's issues. Their admonishes and word of advice resolve the family disputes by adhering to the path of mutual trust and reconciliation to make married life more comfortable. Turkmen people practice monogamy and large families spanning several generations live under one roof. To Turkmen

breaking up the family and living apart is beyond ones imagination and such would be considered a disaster. The chapter as such would identify the status of family as an institution and its impact on the socio-cultural developments of the region. The chapter as such would identify the status of family as an institution and its impact on the socio-cultural developments of the region. The society in Turkmenistan presented a gloomy picture during the Soviet occupation of the country. Majority of the population predominantly Muslim had to bear the brunt of the communist rule. Contrary to their religious beliefs and social ethos women had to be the worst sufferer of the dictates of the Soviet Union subjugated by the men folk and religious leaders alike and were treated as chattel's and forced into hellish marriages living lives of virtual slavery. Although the Muslim in Turkmenistan continued and practiced their traditional faith the Soviet regime sharply restricted the practice of Islam under Stalin and Khrushchev, launched campaigns to destroy the age old faith of the people. Scores of *Ulama* were arrested, religious books were destroyed, schools and local *Maktabas* were closed as a result of which children continued their education at their respective homes. Mosques and other holly places were closed. Role of religion in the upliftment of socio-cultural conditions has been dealt in the chapter as well. The seventh century witnessed glaring change with the coming of Islam in the region. The Arabs brought Islam, the pre-dominant religion of Central Asia to the region in the 7^{th} century. Since then Islam has become an integral part of Turkmen culture .Although Soviet efforts to secularize society were largely successful, the post–Soviet era has been a marked increase in religious practices. With the end of Soviet power, the world witnessed a resurgence of Islam in Central Asian Republics. The rising influence of Islam on Turkmen society can be seen from the substantial increase in the performance of religious rituals and practices. People in general follow strict Islamic rules in marriage, circumcision, burial etc. The chapter as such would give an account of the religiosity of the region after Turkmenistan became an independent country. While the languages of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan all have Turkic roots.

Turkmenistan is the only former Soviet republic with Turkic language. In a move towards greater sovereignty under the Soviet system, the government of Turkmenistan declared Turkic to be the official language in 1989 and called for a gradual transition back to the Arabic alphabet in 1992. With the rise of the neo-Soviet government, this change was never implemented. From 1994, sole official language is Russian and is widely used in government and business dealings. However, 77% of the country is rural who speak mostly Turkic. The chapter therefore would bring into lime light the role of languages in identifying the identity of the Turkmenistan. Since the customs and traditions of a particular society reflect its socio-cultural history, in Turkmenistan many popular customs and traditions have not only been retained but also glorified. Since the customs and traditions of a particular community reflects the socio cultural pattern of the said society. As such, an attempt has been made to address to this vital component of social life in the chapter. In order to understand the socio-religious ethos, of any region, demographic composition and structure constitutes one of the most significant components of the study. Chapter therefore, would bring into limelight the demographic composition and structure of Turkmenistan in order to understand the position of Islam.

Chapter 3nd of the Dissertation is an effort to highlight the state and Islam in the region. Since the downfall of the Russian Empire gave birth to the establishment of Soviet Union. Chapter gives an account of the reasons responsible for the Russian collapse and the formation of Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was a federation of 15 national union republics. Legally, all union republics had equal status with the same degree of self-government and dependence on the federal power, having uniform systems of governing bodies and political institutions and being subordinate to those of the Soviet Union. The chapter therefore would provide an account of the state with special reference to nature of the state: state policies, social and political life. In fact, the chapter is an attempt to study the religion in Soviet Union in its entirety. Islam was severely persecuted and its infrastructure destroyed. However, the

Soviet Union had only about 500 working Islamic mosques, a fraction of the mosques in prerevolutionary Russia, and Soviet law forbade Islamic religious activity outside working mosques and Islamic schools. Four "spiritual directorates" which were established by soviet authorities to provide governmental control supervised all working mosques, religious schools, and Islamic publications. As a result of this an attempt has been made to analyze the socio-religious activities with special reference to the establishment of official and unofficial Islam, Islamic Parties, suppression of Islam under communism, soviets attitude towards Islam, and the revival of Islam in the country.

Before an in-depth study of the Religion and the nature of the state of post-soviet Turkmenistan visa vis its role in the establishment and promotion of religious Institutions, is made, one has to be abreast of the fact that Turkmenistan was ruled by Greeks, Romans, Seljuks, Turks and finally annexed by Russia between 1865 and 1885, It became a Soviet republic in 1925. The Soviet Union was a federation of 15 national union republics. Legally, all union republics had equal status with the same degree of self-government and dependence on the federal power, having uniform systems of governing bodies, political institutions and being subordinate to those of the Soviet Union. The formal governing body in each republic has its own popularly elected legislature, the Supreme Soviet, which met twice a year. Since the soviet doctrine did not accept the concept of the separation of powers, the Supreme Soviet elected its chairman, designated as the formal head of the republic. It also appointed a prime minister and other members of the cabinet, who, according to their positions, were awarded with parliamentary seats. However, the real decision making authority in the republic was the central committee of the republic's communist party. Following this constitutional principle, the secretaries of the central committee provided guidelines to all agencies and institutions of the republics, monitored their daily activities, made all key appointment in state institutions and organized the work of the lower-level (provincial and district) committees, which were in-charge of governing

their respective territories. Being part of the Union, each republic had individual representation in federal authorities. Formerly, each republic of the Soviet Union was a Sovereign State with its own constitution and symbols of sovereignty such as Flag, Coat of Arms, and National anthem. The USSR constitution and constitutions of each republic-, which were largely identical and were passed in 1937 and 1978. The Soviet constitution provided for three types of jurisdiction: all-union, mixed union-republican, where local authorities could exercise some degree of autonomy. Defense, national security, and foreign relations were always the exclusive jurisdiction of federal authorities. Agriculture, health, education; public order, social security, and justice were under the joint jurisdiction of the USSR and republics. Republics were largely responsible for control over local industries, communal economies, services, and road construction. Constitution of all five Central Asian republics proclaimed basic human rights- specially those of women- and they contained statements about struggles with old customs, which excluded women from participating in social, economic, and political events. Unlike all other constitutions, the constitution of Turkmenistan specified that contract marriages, bride purchases restricted choice of husbands, and the resistance to drawing women into study or work were punishable by laws. While the republics were part of the Soviet Union, Russian was the common language for interethnic communications and one of two official language of each republic. All official documents issued by republican authorities were published in two languages- Russian and the native language of the respective republic. All important personnel decisions were made in Moscow according to the principle of dual leadership. Under this principle, a leader of the republic was a native person but always had a reliable Russian assistant to supervise and provide reports to Moscow, where ethnic Russians occupied most of the key positions. During Soviet rule, Central Asia experienced huge success in different areas of activity. The main features of economic development were total nationalization of the economy and establishment of a state monopoly in all areas of technological development, including small local individual enterprises, which

were united into state-controlled cooperatives. As soon as the Soviet power was established, all religious holidays were cancelled and it was prohibited to take off from work any day except Wednesday, because the Bolshevik revolution of October 25, 1917, had occurred on Wednesday. The communist, party monopolized all aspects of social and political life in the Soviet Union and cultural development was subjected to Communist ideology. Historical roots and national specifics were declared signs of backwardness. Russification became primary element of policies applied by Moscow toward the union republics. Social and cultural reforms started with changes in social policy. The cornerstones of this policy were the opening of new schools; mandatory elementary education for all pupils; the elimination of illiteracy; the expansion of publications in native languages; and the establishment of national theaters, universities and research institutions. However, all these developments were coordinated with the ideologists in Moscow and were subject to censorship. In 1926, the government initiated school reform and started to issue permits for opening local private schools. Not ready to prohibit Islam entirely, the government did not openly ban the teaching of religion and required basic sciences be taught as well. Students under the age of eight were not admitted. Corporal punishment was forbidden, and the teaching of arithmetic, natural science, and native languages was obligatory. Students under the age ten were permitted to study only for four hours a day, with breaks every forty minutes, while older students could study up to six hours. It was not permitted for teachers to use students' labor for their personal needs. The students from the Soviet schools were not allowed to attend religious schools. Later, only children ages fourteen and above were allowed to enroll in religious classes because the government hoped that antireligious propaganda would make them immune from Islamic influences. To restrict religious education even further, in 1920, the government limited the religious instruction of children to groups of three students. In 1929, such groups were recognized as small religious schools in secret form and were prohibited completely. Teaching religion in any government, social or private school forbidden. The language reform was

initiated in Turkistan in 1926. The Latin alphabet and a unified mode of transcription replaced Arabic script. The reform was not completed before 1935, when the second reform changed Latin letters to the Cyrillic (Russian) alphabet. It was during the post soviet era that the reform moment reached its zenith. The main purposes of the reform were the further Russification of central Asia, penetration of national languages by the Russian language, and the facilitation of the study of the Russian language by the natives. The reform helped to establish closer cultural ties between Russia and central Asia and performed an ideological function of making all previously published books, mostly of religious and anti-Soviet content, obsolete and not available to the masses. This effect of the language reform coincided (agreed) with the goals of antireligious campaigns that were constantly conducted during Soviet era. According to Keller, the Soviet government attacked religion because its Marxist-Leninist theory dictated an atheist society and because it could not tolerate any rival for power. In 1927, a total attack on religion began. Usually, antireligious campaign were carried by the secret police; the campaigns physically eliminated most of the clergy and imposed strict punishments on believers. Most of the mosques were closed, so the buildings could be used for other purposes- such as warehouses, sport club, or concert halls. The religious Organizations Act of 1929 allowed for the construction of new houses of prayer if general technical requirements were observed; however, special conditions set up by police and not specified in the law were almost impossible to meet. This law prohibited all charitable activities of religious groups and introduced the direct supervision of religious activities by a person from a nearest police unit, village soviet, or city council assigned to attend all meetings of the believers. The agent was an observer with no right to participate in discussions or activities; however, he could close meetings and was obligated to do so in case of an outbreak of violence, deviation from the approved program, illegal activities, or upon the request of the meeting participants. Often, closed mosques were used as court chambers. Muslim courts were not abolished until 1927, although their jurisdiction was gradually

narrowed. In February 1924, they were banned from hearing criminal or important civil cases; two years later, they were prohibited from hearing divorce cases, and the people's Commissariat of justice declared them to be part of strictly voluntary judicial system. The eradication of Islamic courts did not mean the elimination of Islamic judges who proceeded from religious courts to the people's court. Because judges were often unfamiliar with the adopted laws and statues, they made legal mistakes and applied the traditional Islamic Shariah laws. The liberation of women was one of the principle goals of antireligious campaigns aimed at eliminating traditional practices of veiling, polygamy, bride payments, and prearranged child marriages. In Central Asia, the emancipation of women contrasted with the norms of traditional society. The position of women significantly improved during the Soviet rule. When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power, the government's anti-Islamic policy intensified. Later Gorbachev's reforms brought the first relaxation to the religions of Soviet Muslims: the restoration of mosques was allowed, and the first political rise of Islamic self-consciousness was tolerated. In the late 1980s, the idea of sovereign state development became especially popular among national elites and intellectuals. In 1989 and 1990, all five republics adopted laws regulating the status of national languages, which were recognized as official state languages. The study of native languages was initiated and, together with the publication of previously prohibited Books of national authors, it became a factor in the growing national self-consciousness. Since Islam was not destroyed by repressions, Rashidov, Kunaev, and other local leaders assured federal authorities that Central Asian Islam presented no danger to Bolshevik rule. In reality, local elites were actively involved in destroying Islam, seeing its representatives as potential contenders (candidates) to local political power. The local party elite replaced the regular clergy with local clergy who were willing to follow the directives of local party committees and the secret police. Although most of the population avoided any alliance (coalition) with the discredited clergy, these people were viewed with some respected by the people of Central Asia because they knew Arabic, could read

the Quran, and pilgrimaged. While travelling throughout the Muslim community abroad, they promoted a positive image of Soviet Union. The parallel existence of official and unofficial (underground) Islam in Central Asia continued to the end of 1980s. The chapter therefore is an effort to highlight nature and structure of the state. An effort has been made to study the Islam in Soviet period in its totality and Soviet policies towards Islam. Moreover, role of Sufi brotherhood in spreading and preserving Islam and Soviet measures against *Sufism*.

Chapter 4th constitutes the most significant component of the present study that throws light on the formation of the state. The collapse of the Soviet Union gives birth to the establishment of independent Turkmenistan. Chapter gives an account of the reasons responsible for the soviet collapse and the task to be under taken by Turkmenistan after its independence. When Turkmenistan achieved its independence, the new government did not bring freedom to the country but established an authoritarian regime. The chapter therefore would provide an account of the state with special reference to nature of the state: State Policies (Niyazov's Legacy), , Separation of Politics and Religion, Society of Turkmenistan, Education, Health Care, Human Rights, and Economy. In fact, the chapter is an attempt to study the religion in Turkmenistan in its entirety, especially on the eve of Independence. The Soviet Union disintegrated suddenly, without warning or preparation, at the end of 1991. In Central Asia, Islam was still largely a marker of a cultural identity. The vast majority of the population still had very little knowledge of the doctrines and practices of faith. As a result of this an attempt has been made to analyze the socio-religious activities with special reference to the establishment of *Mosques* as well as *Madrasas* as centre of higher religious learning and knowledge, Post Soviet Islamization, Recreating an Islamic Infrastructure, Muslim Missionaries and also Islam and the State. Moreover, the attitude of the government towards Islam and these centers has also been taken into consideration with special reference to Religion and Cult of Personality, Laws

on Religion, and Religious Intolerance in Turkmenistan. It is seen that after the breakup of the Soviet Union, former Communist Party Saparmurat Niyazov became the country's first President; Turkmenistan is governed under the constitution of 1992. The president, who is both head of state and head of government, is elected by popular vote for a five-year term. There are two legislative bodies. A law adopted in 2003 effectively makes the president the head of both the executive and legislative branches of government. According to the constitution, Turkmenistan is a secular democratic and presidential republic. The government has three branches: **Executive** - President and the Council of Ministers, **Legislative** - Mejlis (Parliament), **and Judicial** - Supreme Court. The legal system is based on the civil law system. There is only one party, which is allowed to work i.e. Democratic Party of Turkmenistan. Despite the unopposed establishment of Saparmurat Niyazov as president for life, formal opposition parties are outlawed. Turkmenistan has a regime under which very little NGO activity is possible. There is no NGO law and it is very difficult to register an organization because after independence the Turkmenistan government uses its laws to deny NGO registration in order to control the NGO sector. He ruled Turkmenistan with an iron fist until 9 December 2006. His legacy is a regime of totalitarian control, paranoid dictatorship and an absence of basic freedom and human rights for the citizens of Turkmenistan. During the rule, the new independent Turkmen state under the leadership of Saparmurat Turkmenbashi did not bring freedom to the country but instead established one of the most isolated and authoritarian regimes of the contemporary world characterized by extremities and contradictions. The state, claiming to be the agent of revival, authenticity and emancipation against the notorious Soviet legacy; was indeed a political and structural continuation of the Turkmen SSR and was most of the time reproductive of Soviet-style socio-political modalities of public control and suppression, particularly regarding its authoritarianism, isolationism and intensive propaganda campaigns. The president of this state, claiming to be the father of the Turkmen; was not only among the most authoritarian leaders of

the century but was also ignorant of the real social and economic needs of his people. His government gutted the country's educational system and destroyed the medical system. He erected gold plated statues of himself all over the country and his portrait hung in every public room and on every public building. He also built enormous government buildings at the expense of ordinary citizens, most of whom lived in extreme poverty, and systematically isolated Turkmenistan by outlawing foreign publications, maintaining full control over the Internet, and censoring all media. Freedom of association was extremely limited and he maintained full control over the political system, outlawing opposition and suppressing all forms of expression. Moreover, all missionaries were expelled and all religious activities have been highly repressed. He created an unrivalled cult of personality, even renaming the months of the year after members of his family and decreeing that the Ruhnama, a spiritual guide he allegedly wrote, be taught in schools throughout the country and, often, be recited from memory as a precondition to obtain jobs. The state has been governed neither by the Quran nor by the Sunnah but only by the president's book, Ruhnama. Consequently, an entire generation has undergone extensive brain washing. Following Niyazov's death in December 2006, Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, who had been serving as the Minister of Health and Deputy Prime Minister under Niyazov, was appointed acting President until he was elected in February 2007. The new president, Gurbanguly Berdymuhamedov, has promised to continue Niyazov's political heritage. Schoolchildren are still required to memorize portions of the former president's book, Ruhnama. There is no critical voice or opposition allowed in the country and the government continues to control all media.

Islam came to Turkmen primarily through the activities of Sufi Sheikhs rather than the mosque and the "high" written tradition of sedentary culture. During the Soviet rule, all religious beliefs were attacked by the communist authorities as superstition and "vestiges of the past". Most religious schooling and religious observances were banned, thousands of mosques were closed, and many signs of the Muslim religion were made illegal. An official Muslim

Board of Central Asia, with headquarter in Tashkent, was established during the II World War to supervise Islam in Central Asia. For the most part, the Muslim Board functioned as an instrument of propaganda whose activities did little to enhance the Muslim cause. Atheist introduction muffled the religious development and contributed to the isolation of Turkmen from the international Muslim community.

Some religious customs such as, burial and male circumcision continued to be practiced throughout the Soviet period but most of the religious beliefs, knowledge and customs were preserved only in rural areas in "folk from" as a kind of "unofficial Islam" which was not sanctioned by the state. By 1960s, the Soviet regime realized that Islam could not be entirely eradicated from Central Asia for domestic as well as political reasons, Moscow established "official Islam" allowing the functioning of a handful of state-controlled mosques and religious schools. Similarly, the regime permitted a small number of Muslims to make the annual Hajj pilgrimage to Makah.

Even before Soviet occupation of Central Asian lands, the population was accustomed to being oppressed and tortured by the Amirs but at least they were left alone to practice their age-old customs and religion. While radical Islam spread elsewhere in the Arab World, Central Asia was kept out of its influence by the Iron curtain. It was not until the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1991 that most of the Central Asian people became aware of these ideas and ideologies because the most widely practiced form of Islam in Central Asia was traditional Sufism, which placed stress on mysticism, music, poetry, tolerance and did not subject women to severe constraints. Thus, even under Soviet rule in Central Asia, adherence to Islam continued as a covert activity with local Communist party chiefs deliberately ignoring private observance of Islam. After Independence, the authoritarian, Niyazov, assumed the title "*Turkameabashi",* or *"Leader of all Turkmen",* but was accused of developing a totalitarian cult of personality. His opus, the *Ruhnama*, is a mandatory

reading in Turkmenistan's schools and months of the calendar have been renamed after members of his family. This in fact, demonstrates his concern for Islam and Islamic literature. Besides, opposition parties are banned in Turkmenistan and the government controls all sources of information. The leaders of Central Asian states differ on how to govern their traumatized people, coming from the old communist system, but they were of the same kind; having authoritative, and with little tolerance to democracy. Over the years, leaders like Saparmurad Niyazov (Turkmenistan), Islam Karimov (Uzbekistan), Nursultan Nazarbeyey (Kazakhstan), have turned out to be power-hungry politicians who have bestowed upon themselves vast powers, intolerant to criticism and opposition. After assuming power, the first secretary of communist party of Turkmenistan, Saparmurad Niyazov, disbanded the party and changed its name to Turkmenistan Democratic Party (TDP), became a democrat and proclaimed Turkmenistan a secular state. The current government oversees official Islam through a structure inherited from the Soviet period. Turkmenistan Muslim Religious Board, together with that of Uzbekistan, constitutes the Religious Board of *Mavarannahr* situated in Tashkant exerts considerable influence in appointments of religious leaders in Turkmenistan. The governing body of Islamic judges (*Qaziat*) is registered with the Turkmenistan ministry of justice, a council of religious affairs under the cabinet ministers monitor activities of clergy. Those who wish to become members of the official clergy are required to attend official religious institutions; a few, however, may prove their qualification simply by taking an examination. Although the great majority of Turkmen readily identify themselves as Muslim and acknowledge Islam as an integral part of their cultural heritage, many are non-believers and support revival of the religion as an element of national revival. They do not attend mosque services or demonstrate their religious adherence publicly, except through participation in officially sanctioned national traditions associated with Islam on a popular level. Since 1990, efforts have been made to regain some of the cultural heritage lost under Soviet rule President Niyazov has ordered that basic Islamic

principles be taught in public schools. A good number of religious institutions including religious schools and mosques have been established with the active support of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Turkey. As a practice of Abbasid regime, religious classes are held in both the schools and mosques and the subjects like *Quran*, *Hadith* and the history of Islam are being taught on regular basis. With a view to satisfy the wishes of the population, Turkmenistan government has allowed a modest, state-sponsored and tightly controlled revival of Islam since independence. As against four mosques operating during the Soviet era, now there are an estimated 318 mosques open for Muslims. Nevertheless, mosque-based Islam does not play a dominant role in the society, partly due to 70 years of Soviet rule and partly because of the country's indigenous religious culture. Traditionally, Turkmen express Islam more through rituals associated with birth, marriage, death and through pilgrimage to the tombs of Saints, rather than through regular attendance at a mosque. Though there is no state religion, the government however, has incorporated some aspects of Islamic tradition with a view to redefine a national identity. These Islamic traditions have been confirmed and in order to ensure that foreign Islamic movements do not spread into the country, the government exercises strict control and restricts access to Islamic education since 1997, and mosque based Imams are restricted to teach Islam. Criticizing the expansion of the network of Islamic schools, president Niyazov ordered in June, 2001, the closure of *Zamakshri Madrasa* in Dashoguaz, leaving the theological faculty at Turkmen State University in Ashgabat as the only remaining government centre for Islamic education but there remain no religious instruction in public schools. The government stresses its secular nature and support of freedom of religious belief as embodied in the 1991 Law on freedom of conscience, on religious organizations in Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic and institutionalized the same in 1992 constitution. The document guarantees the separation of church and state; it also removes any legal basis for Islam to play a role in political life by prohibiting distribution of "unofficial" religious literature, discrimination based on religion, and the formation of religious political parties. In addition,

the government reserves the right to appoint and dismiss anyone who teaches religious matters or who is a member of clergy. The serious mistreatment of some minority religious members continued which began in 2003 and was extended to the Muslim community. In March 2004, Turkmenistan's popular and respected Mufti, Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah, was secretly tied and sentenced to 22 years in prison, reportedly for his alleged role in a failed 2002 coup plot. He has been dismissed as Mufti in 2003, reportedly for his refusal to teach the president's book, Ruhnama, as a sacred text. Since independence, the Islamic leadership in Turkmenistan has been more assertive but in large part, it responds to government control. The official governing body of religious judges gave its official support to president Niyazov in June 1992 elections. In the backdrop of this situation, some Muslim leaders are opposed to the secular concept of government and especially to a government controlled by former communists. Some official leaders and teachers working outside the official structure have vowed to increase the knowledge of Islam, to increase Islam's role in society, and broaden adherence to its tenets. Alarmed that such activism may aggravate tensions, the government has drawn up plans to elevate the council of religious affairs to ministry status and regulate religious activities more tightly. In the beginning of 1998, the Turkmen government expelled almost all missionaries and all religious activities have been highly repressed. The Turkmen intelligence services carefully watch those known to be believers as well as foreigners. Turkmenistan has one of the most oppressive regimes of the world. The chapter therefore throws light on the nature, formation and structure of the state. In fact, the present chapter is an attempt to study the religion in Turkmenistan in its entirety, especially, after its disintegration from USSR.

Finally, in the concluding part of the dissertation an attempt has been made to the results drawn from this study. It is a humble effort to provide suggestions, necessary steps that can be taken by the authorities to improve the condition of Turkmenistan.

CHAPTER - 2
SOCIAL-RELIGIOUS MILIEU

Society

Turkmenistan is a tribal society with a stratified social structure. The tribes claim a common mythical ancestor, Oghuz Khan, from whom they are descended. The genealogical connection within each group is so strong that each tribe considers itself as the true representative of "Turkmen."[111] Each large tribe is identifiable based on carpet pattern, clothing, and headgear.[112] There are also groups with deep roots in Turkmenistan that do not trace their ancestry back to Oghuz Khan. Instead, they appear to be descended from other Turks and Persian settlers. In addition, there are ethnic minorities such as Uzbeks and Tajiks who live inside the borders of Turkmenistan.[113]

The Turkmen people have traditionally been nomads, horsemen, and even today after the fall of the USSR attempts to urbanize the Turkmens have not been very successful. They never really formed a coherent nation or ethnic group until forged into one by Joseph Stalin in the 1930s. Turkmen are divided into clans, and each clan has its own dialect and style of dress.[114] The Turkmens are mostly Sunni Muslims and adhere to Islam rather loosely and combine Islam with pre-Islamic traditions. Having their inclination towards Sufi version of Islam. They never advocated fundamentalism as a means to propagate Islam in the region. The Turkmen were mainly nomadic people for most of their history and they were not settled in cities and towns until the advent of the Soviet system of government, which severely restricted freedom of movement and collectivized nomadic herdsmen by the 1930s. Many pre-Soviet cultural traits have survived in Turkmen society and have recently undergone a kind of revival.

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111 Edgar, Adrienne, *"Identities, Communities and Nations in Central Asia: A Historical Perspective." (Paper presented at the "Central Asia and Russia: Responses to the 'Waron Terrorism.'")* Berkeley: University of California, 29 October 2010. http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~bsp/caucasus/articles/edgar_2001-1029.pdf
112 Country Studies. U.S. Library of Congress. "*Turkmenistan Social Structure*". 1996.
113 Staples, "*The Europe world year book 1996*", vol. ii Europe publications, England, 1996, p. 3071.
114 Turkmens are famous for making *gillams,* mistakenly called *Bukhara rugs* in the West. These are elaborate and colourful rugs, and these too help indicate the distinction between the various Turkmen clans.

Customs and Traditions

Turkmen lifestyle was heavily invested in horsemanship and as a prominent horse culture; Turkmen horse breeding was an age-old tradition. In spite of changes prompted by the Soviet period, a tribe in southern Turkmenistan has been known for its horses, the Akhal-Teke *desert horse* - and the horse breeding tradition has returned to its previous prominence in recent years.[115] Turkmen are also famous for their excellent carpets, embroidery, women's dress, and jewellery. Many tribal customs still survive among modern Turkmen. Unique to Turkmen culture is *kalim*, which is a groom's "dowry," that can be quite expensive and often results in the widely practiced tradition of bridal kidnapping[116] In something of a modern parallel, President Saparmurat Niyazov introduced a state enforced "*kalim*," wherein all foreigners are required to pay a sum of no less than $50,000 to marry a Turkmen woman. Other customs include the consultation of tribal elders, whose advice is often eagerly sought and respected. Many Turkmen still live in extended families where multiple generations still live under single roof, especially in rural areas.[117] They have a rich musical and literary tradition. The most famous Turkmen poet is Magtymguly, who is the 18th-century author of many nationalist and lyric poems.[118] The five traditional carpet designs that form motifs in the country's state emblem and flag represent the five major tribes,[119] and the Islamic crescent moon. As an emblematic color of Islam, the green background emphasizes the nation's Muslim heritage. The traditional Turkmen dwelling is a felt tent called a *gara oy* (black house) or a "yurt" in Western literature.[120] Today most Turkmen live in modern housing, and *gara oys* are only used for summer recreation and holidays. In rural areas, most people live

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115 Hunsicker, David R., Jr. "*The Historical Significance of the Akhal-Teke in Turkmen Identity*". Presented at the 11th Annual Nicholas Poppe Symposium, University of Washington, 1999.

116 Bride kidnapping, also known as marriage by abduction or marriage by capture, is a practice throughout history and around the world in which a man abducts the woman he wishes to marry.

117 Turkmen culture, http:// www. Culture. Com

118 The music of the nomadic and rural Turkmen people reflects rich oral traditions, where itinerant bards usually sing epics such as Koroglu. These itinerant singers are called *bakshy*; they also act as healers and magicians and sing a cappella or with instruments such as the two-stringed lute called dutar.

119 These Turkmen tribes are Teke (Tekke), Yomut (Yomud), Arsary (Ersari), Chowdur (Choudur), and Saryk (Saryq).

120 A thick felt covering is draped over a wooden frame, leaving an entrance and a round opening at the top to allow smoke to escape. The frame is collapsible so that the tent can be dismantled quickly for travel.

in one-story houses made of clay and straw. Often these houses are located within a walled courtyard with an agricultural plot and livestock. In the cities of Turkmenistan, high-rise apartment dwellings are also common. Furniture was borrowed from the West and its use varies. Some homes were furnitured whereas others were not. The traditional bedding consists of padded mats that are laid on the floor at bedtime. In the morning, they are folded and placed in a designated corner with the blankets and pillows. This allows sleeping space to be used for other purposes during the day. Some families, primarily in the cities, have a worktable in the kitchen area, but most Turkmen eat sitting on the floor. They spread a large cloth on the floor, with food and dishes placed on top of it. Guests occupy the place of honor, which is made soft with pillows or quilts. Turkmen traditionally have a toilet outside of the main living space, although some rural families use outhouses.[121] In the cities, where most people live in apartments or small houses, there is no space for this arrangement, but many households separate the toilet by locating it in one room and placing the sink and shower in a nearby room. Cooking is done in a separate space; some homes have a small building for preparing food, dying yarn, and storing utensils. This is the domain of women, and it is unusual for neighbours or relatives to arrive uninvited to lend a hand or to bring their own chores so that they can work and socialize at the same time. Moreover, outside Cooking (roasting meat and popping corn) is handled by men and often becomes a social activity, with neighbours and friends forming a small crowd.

[121] A separate building containing a toilet and sink is typical.

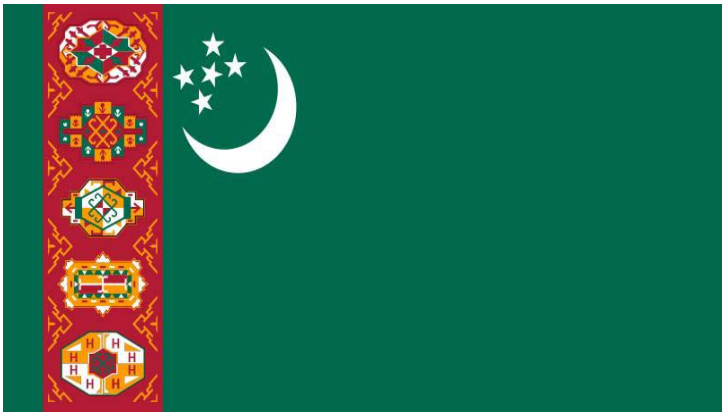

Fig 1: (Flag)
Source: "File: Flag of Turkmenistan (1997-2001).svg", Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Turkmenistan_%281992-1997%29.svg

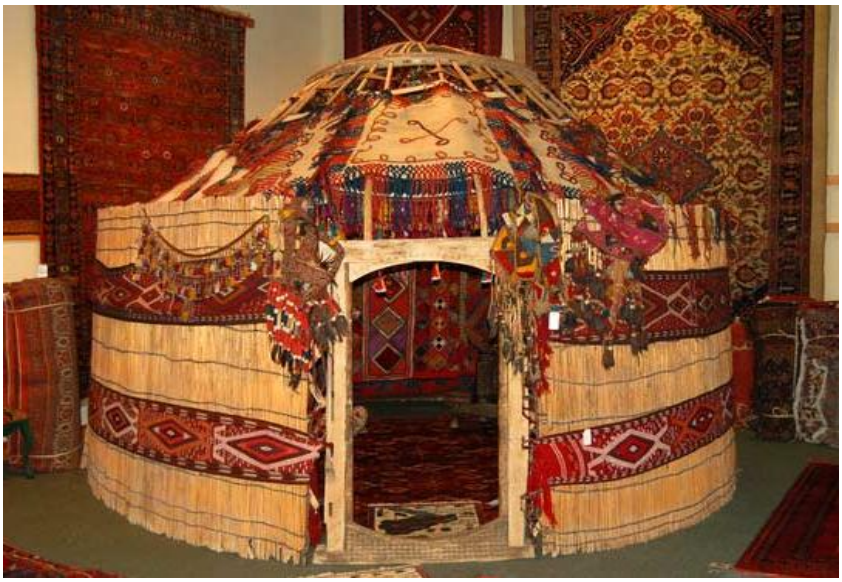

Fig 2: (Yurt)
Source: http://www.internetrugs.com/blog/come-and-see-our-turkmen-yurt/

The diet shows a Russian influence and imported items are available at a high price, but Turkmen food generally remains traditional. Hot green tea (gok *cay)* is a part of every meal, even in the hottest days, and round flatbread is a staple throughout Central Asia. Turkmen drink hot tea year round from shallow bowl-like cups called *kases.* A good host will not fill the guest's cup to the brim to demonstrate that she is being attentive, and will pour many times if she wishes the guest to stay. Turkmen eat a lot of meat, primarily from sheep and cows but also from camels, goats, chicken, and despite the Muslim tradition,

pigs. Most meat dishes are baked or boiled. They also use milk from these animals. *Manty* is a popular version, eaten with yogurt on top. One favorite Turkmen dish is *dograma*[122], which is usually served with meat or noodles and may be eaten for breakfast when relatives or guests visit; the food is spread out on plates and dishes on a large cloth on the floor. Guests and family members sit and have their meal around this cloth covered with food (called a *sachak).* A typical Turkmen sachak will include a variety of fruits, vegetables, nuts, sweets, tea and other breads, as well as butters and creams—all this before the main meal. Bread is eaten at every meal. Russian-style loaves can be bought cheaply, and traditional flatbread (corek) is often made at home in a *tamdyr*[123]. In the cities, several apartment buildings may share a single *tamdyr*. Turkmen also drink black tea, seltzer water, and imported sodas. Despite the ban on alcohol among some Muslim people, Turkmen drink wine, liquor and Turkmen wine has won international competitions.

Fig:3 (Tamdyr)
Source:http://www.turkmenistaninfo.ru/?page_id=6&type=article&elem_id=page_6/magazine_10/83 &lang_id=en&layout=print

The separation of space with regard to gender is an aspect of life that varies greatly. Men and women may sit and eat together, or may remain in separate

122 A thick soup made with diced bread, lamb, onions, tomatoes, and spices.
123 A *tamdyr* is a traditional Central Asian dome-shaped clay oven placed outside the home.

rooms during a social event. Some women continue the tradition of wearing a *yasmak* in the first year of marriage. The bride holds the corner of her scarf between her teeth to serve as a symbolic barrier between her and any male visitors who are not familiar or to show deference to her in-laws; the scarf also prevents her from speaking. A woman may stop wearing a *yasmak* after one year of marriage, after the birth of a child, as result of an agreement within the family. Moreover, they are conscientious about keeping living spaces clean. They never wear shoes in the house but wear and provide guests with slippers. Acts of personal hygiene such as cutting the hair and nails are done in the bath area, never in the main living space. Almost every available space in a home, except the washroom and kitchen, is covered with carpets. Floors are covered with multiple carpets, chairs are draped with a medium-sized rug or a square seat covering, and the walls display large and often valuable carpets.

The most prominent feature of traditional Turkmen male clothing is the *telpek*, a high sheepskin hat. It may be brown, black, or white and is typically very shaggy. Men who wear the *telpek* usually wear a skullcap beneath it and shave their heads. Long, deep-red robes with wide sleeves are also common in traditional settings.[124] In the cities; the clothing of the Turkmen male differs little from that of men in the West. A suit jacket (without a tie) and pants are the norm, and no hat is worn. Turkmen women, both urban and rural, typically wear more traditional clothing than men do. The main features are a long dress over narrow trousers (the pants are trimmed with a band of embroidery at the ankle), a long headscarf, and a cloak-type red robe called a *kurte*.[125] Most Turkmen women consider Western-style clothing too immodest-Slacks, skirts, Tank tops, shorts etc. They only sew a special type of embroidery called *keshde,* which adorns the collars and fringes of their clothing. Female headdresses usually consist of silver jewellery. Bracelets and brooches are set

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[124] Francis Henry Skrine and Edward Denison Ross, Ph.d, *The Heart of Asia; A History of Russian Turkestan and the Central Asian Khanates from the Earliest Times,* Methuen and Co. 36 Essex Street, W.C. London 1899, p.280.

[125] Carol R. Ember, Melvin Ember, *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender; men and women in the world's cultures,* Vol .II, Springer, 2003, p.994

with semi-precious stones Young women with two braids and a small scarf are unmarried; those with one braid and a big kerchief have been wed.

Fig: 4 (Telpek)
Source: http://www.travelblog.org/Photos/1643237

Social Events

Weddings

Two main events highlight the cycle of life that begins with birth. They are marriage and death. Marriage often begins with a young man's mother seeking a *kelin* or bride for her son. When a suitable virgin has been found and discreet inquiries made about her character and her family, a delegation from the groom's family makes a visit to the house of the *kelin*. Sweets are exchanged and, over tea, an offer of marriage is made on the groom's behalf. The *kelin* may decline or accept and if she accepts, serious preparations begin. The *patirtoy*, a ceremony at which both families share flaked bread, signals the first of the formalities that culminate weeks later in the actual marriage. The groom's mother tenders the bride price or dowry, which was agreed to in early negotiations, to the bride's family. The groom's mother also presents the *kelin* a large bag of groceries every Sunday for several weeks before the wedding ceremony. Other gifts like jewellery and bridal dresses are presented as well. Finally, on the eve of wedding, females on both sides perform the *hennayoka*,

decorating hands, feet and sometimes the face and ears with intricate designs in dark amber henna. At the groom's house, a rowdy bachelor party takes place the same evening with musicians and dancers. On the morning of the wedding ceremony, the bride, groom, and important relatives visit the local registry office to record their marriage in an official registry book. Following this, the couple part and return to their individual houses. When they next meet a few hours later, it is at the groom's house where the *kelin salam* or greeting of the bride takes place. The bride's parents do not attend the feast at the groom's house. Dressed in white with braided hair and covered with a white gauze veil, the bride bows to the groom and guests in a sign of submission to her marital duties. Feasting and celebration in the presence of the extended family, friends, and neighbours continues throughout the day and into the evening. Late in the evening, the newly wedded couple retires to their room or to a bridal *yurt* erected for the occasion.[126]

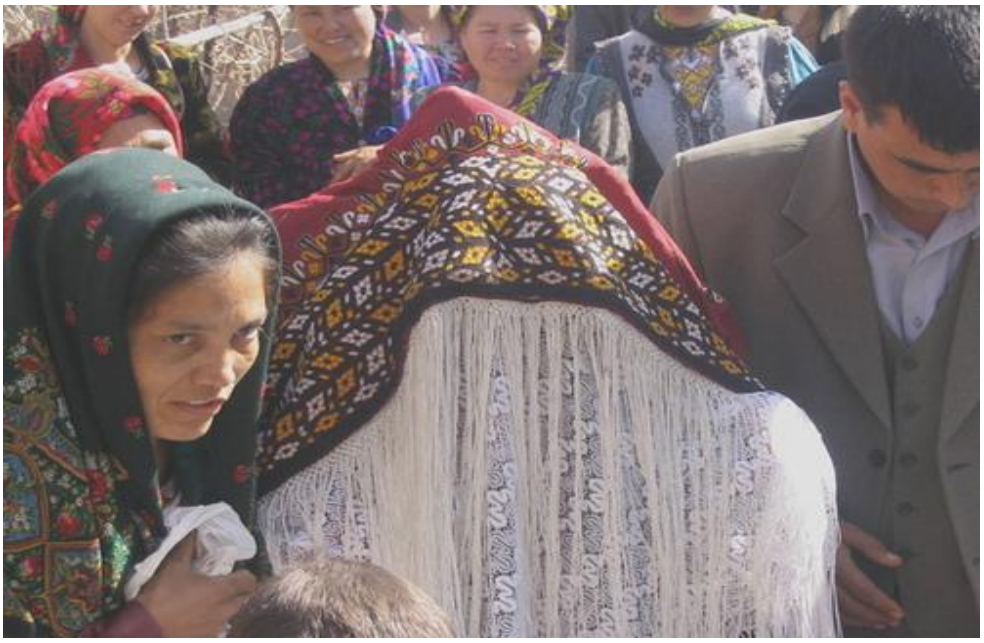

Fig 5: (Kelin)
Source: http://www.noi.peetahvw.com/Turkmenistan.html

[126] The Khiva Interactive Guidebook. "Weddings and Kelin." http://www.khiva.info/gb/festivals/lifecel/wedding.htm

Funerals

Turkmen perform burial ceremonies according to Islamic law, and did so, even under communism. Women do not attend funerals, but do participate in the commemoratory feasts held at seven days, forty days, and one year after a death. Turkmen prefer to use the term "to pass on" (aradan *cykmak),* rather than "to die" (olmek*).* The sound of wailing alerts the neighborhood to a death in the family. Because Islamic tradition requires a speedy burial, the same day or within twenty-four hours if possible, events proceed rather quickly. An undertaker of the same gender as the deceased is summoned and together with relatives of the deceased, the body is washed. The jaw is tied shut and the ankles are bound. The body is then wrapped in a white shroud several meters long. While the male relatives are preparing the gravesite, the *kelin* of the house makes a plate of rice and each mourner in the house takes one grain. She also bakes nine loaves of *corek* bread to give to funeral guests. Male relatives gather on benches outside the house as a *mullah* chants verses from the Quran. When the tomb has been prepared, the body is placed in a simple wooden coffin and carried from the house. On leaving, the coffin is knocked three times against the doorpost of the house as a final goodbye. Females remain at home while male relatives bear the coffin to the tomb. A *janazah*, or funeral prayer, is recited at the gravesite and the body is removed from the wooden coffin and placed in the tomb with the head pointing in the direction of Mecca. The period of mourning lasts forty days, with men wearing a black skullcap and women a white headscarf. During the period of mourning, the grieving family will observe no festivities.[127] It is very unlikely that a foreigner would be invited to participate in a funeral in Turkmenistan.

The Evil Eye

The concept of the “evil eye” is an important aspect in Turkmenistan. Bazaars are full of goods marketed to ward off the evil eye. Most of the accidents,

[127] The Khiva Interactive Guidebook. “Death and Dying.” http://www.khiva.info/gb/festivals/lifecel/death.htm

which do not have an obvious cause, are attributed to the powers of the evil eye. As a precaution, Turkmen hang a shrub with spherical twigs over their doorways that are thought to have the power to ward off the effects of this unwelcome spirit. The belief in the "evil eye" as a destructive force is mixture of pre Islamic superstition and Islamic faith, which lived undiminished through the Soviet era. Belief in the evil eye is alive and well throughout Turkmenistan's society. The destructive gaze, intentional or accidental, of people with a "hard gaze", transmits the evil eye. Most often, it is by an older woman, envious of wealth or beauty. However, it can be unwittingly passed on through idle compliments or praise. Those most vulnerable to the effects of the evil eye are infants in the first forty days of life, handsome children, and brides preparing for marriage. No one however is immune. Human conduct can help ward off the "eye." One can avoid ostentatious displays of wealth or beauty or idle compliments concerning children or valuable objects belonging to others. Artisans sometimes intentionally build flaws into their crafts to divert the glance of the eye, noting that only God is capable of perfect workmanship. There is a long list of practical things that can be done to drive away the eye. Quranic verses are displayed on the walls of houses or sealed inside triangular silver pendants worn about a woman's neck to afford protection. Phials of salt, dried chili peppers or ram's horns are suspended above the front door of a house. Spitting on the ground three times and uttering a quick incantation will also remove the evil eye. The camel is thought to be a powerful ally in the fight against evil and camel hair bracelets or colourful weaves suspended from a car's rear view mirror are conspicuous talismans. One of the most potent and immediate antidotes is the fumes of a burning *Isfand herb*, which fumigates a room and renders it free of the evil eye. [128]

Naming Conventions

In Turkmenistan, the grandparents usually name children during the first week of life. Often a mullah or holy man is invited to say prayers after which he will

[128] The Khiva Interactive Guidebook. "The Evil Eye." http://www.khiva.info/gb/customs/evileye.htm

recite the child's name three times into each ear along with the *sura fathiha* (opening chapter of the Quran). In accordance with Sunni Muslim practice, children can be named by selecting a first name that commemorates some Islamic hero or includes an amalgam of "abd" (servant of) plus one of the ninety nine divine Quranic attributes, e.g., "Abd-el-Jelil" (Servant of the Exalted). A long list of Quranic and genteel names for girls exists as well. Children also carry their patronymic name (father's name) as a middle or second name. Family names remain unchanged and women take on their husband's surname. Occasionally, a child may be named according to its place in the family or to particular circumstances surrounding its birth. For example, a sickly child might be named Umid (hope) or a child born after previous miscarriages could be called Toxtajan (stop). [129]

Family Celebrations

In addition to marriages, births, and deaths, other rituals have grown up around life cycle events in Turkmenistan. Each festival is preceded by elaborate planning and preparation. The first such celebration is the *beshik* or wooden cradle ritual. A child is placed into a wooden cradle in the first days of life and spends its first year of life in the covered wooden ark, safe from the evil eye. The *sunnet* is the ceremony of circumcision for male children between the ages of five and seven. Girls who have been selected to be brides are honoured in the *kelin* or bridal shower celebration. Later in life, men and women who have reached the age of sixty-three are treated to a special birthday celebration. The number 63 is significant because it commemorates the longevity of the prophet Muhammad. All of these celebrations are the occasion for music, dance, festive costumes, and kitchen delicacies. Friends, relatives, neighbours, and visiting dignitaries are invited to join the festivities.[130]

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[129] The Khiva Interactive Guidebook. "Beshiks and Babies." http://www.khiva.info/gb/festivals/lifecel/beshiks.htm

[130] Eurasia.net "National Minorities are Losing Their Cultural Identity " http://www.eurasianet.org/turkmenistan.project/files2/040825cultural_identity(eng).doc

Secular Celebrations

June is the only month that does not have an official state holiday. The country follows a western calendar and the first bank holiday is 1st January, New Year. On 12th January the nation observes a Remembrance Day as a day of solemnity. Flag Day is 19th February, a day for parades and nationalistic speeches by politicians. On this day in 1992, the country's new flag was adopted. On 8th March, the country honours women by observing International Women's Day. During the same month, the ancient Persian spring festival, Novruz, is celebrated on three successive days: 20th, 21st, 22nd March. It is the most ancient of Central Asian festivals and a time of festive meals, music, and regional fairs. 6th April is celebrated, as a Drop of Water Is a Grain Gold Day and the last Sunday in April is a rodeo day for southern Turkmenistan. On this day, the famous local breed of cavalry mount, the Akhal Teke horses, are put on show. Victory Day on 9 May was added by the Soviets following the Second World War. It memorializes the collective victory of allied and socialist forces over the fascist forces of Mussolini, Hitler, and the Japanese. On Constitution Day, 18th May, Turkmen observe the ratification of their post-independence constitution in 1992 and 25th May is the Carpet Day. The Day of the First Election of the President is marked on 21st June. The third Sunday of July, Harvest Day, was also introduced during the Soviet era to recognize wheat production record. Melon Day, on the other hand, is a farmer's festival. It is celebrated on the 2nd Sunday in August. The 2nd Saturday in September, Singers' Day, is a day on which the poets and singers of Turkmenistan are honoured. The victims of the devastating earthquake of 1948 that demolished the city of Ashgabat and killed 100,000 are remembered on Earthquake Day, 6th October. 17th November (Student Youth Holiday). Although true independence came after the fall of the Soviet Union and the ratification of the constitution, 27th November is remembered as the day when Turkmenistan declared itself an autonomous republic in 1990.[131] 7th December (Good

[131] Oriental Express Central Asia, 'About Turkmenistan: Turkmenistan Holidays', 2003–2008, http://turkmenistan.orexca.com/eng/info/holidays.html

Neighbourliness Day) and the last official bank holiday of the year, Neutrality Day on 12th December, reaffirms Turkmenistan's decision to remain neutral in regional and global conflict issues. The United Nations officially recognized this status in 1995. [132]

Economy

Turkmenistan's economy is predominantly agricultural. Agriculture accounts for almost half of the GDP and more than two-fifths of total employment, whereas industry accounts for about one-fifth of GDP and slightly more than one-tenth of total employment. In 1988, the per capita NMP output was 61 % of the Soviet average, fourth lowest of the Soviet republics.[133] In 1991, 17.2 %of the work force was engaged in private-sector occupations such as farming, individual endeavors, and employment on agreement; 0.7 % worked in rented enterprises, and the rest worked for state enterprises, social organizations, and collective farms.[134] Historically, land and water were held in common by villages and nomadic groups. Under the Soviet system all land and property was under government control. The new government has been moving slowly toward privatization and redistribution of collective farmland. In 1995, the government restructured farms into peasant associations so that individuals, preferably groups, could lease land.[26] The administration also revived the traditional position of *mirab* (the post responsible for overseeing water distribution and teaching irrigation management). Legalities for foreign ownership of land and buildings are in the process of being settled.[135] Agriculture is the basis of the economy, especially cotton farming. Many Soviet-era state and collective farms still operate, producing grains, melons, grapes, and silk as well as cotton. Livestock raising is a time-honoured occupation, and the milk, skins, and wool from cattle, sheep, camels, and goats

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132 The United Nations Development Programme. "Turkmenistan: Resident Coordinator's Statement on the Occasion of Neutrality of Turkmenistan". 11 December 2010 http://www.undptkm.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=54&Itemid=52

133 Mary Buckley, Post-Soviet Women, From the Baltic to Central Asia, Cambridge University Press, London, 1997, p.271.

134 Anuradha Chenoy, *A Making of New Russia, New Delhi, 2002,* p.232.

135 Ibid., p.233.

generate other enterprises. While many manufactured goods are imported or bought on trips abroad to places like the United Arab Emirates or Turkey, textiles are still produced for daily use. Turkmen carpets are known worldwide for their beauty and quality. Many individuals make carpets at home, but the Turkmenistan Carpet Production Association oversees carpet factories, operates the only carpet store, and controls exports by requiring its seal of approval on carpets leaving the country. It is illegal to export national treasures such as antique carpets. [136] The oil and gas industries occupy an important space in Turkmenistan's current economic development as well as in its vision for the future. Attracting foreign investors and constructing pipelines have been at the top of the government's agenda since 1992 when they began holding international conferences to gather oil companies and promote international competition for investment. To encourage such capital investments, efforts have been made to improve the banking industry and tax codes. Turkmenistan's commitment to these industries also influences its foreign policy as it nurtures relationships with many potential investors and customers as well as neighbors like Iran that may be in a position to host a gas or oil pipeline. The Petro-chemical industry has been developing slowly but consistently. Two refineries, one in Turkmenbaşy and one in Çharjew (Turkmenabad), have an annual capacity to process 7.7 million tons of oil. A facility to produce poly-ethane was opened in 1997. Chemical facilities have been established to produce artificial fertilizers, sulphuric acid, and ammonia detergents. A super-phosphate factory, a sulphur factory, iodine and bromine factories have been erected in different regions including Charjew, Gowurdak, and Cheleken. Imports include processed food and nonfood products for the consumer market, industrial chemicals such as fertilizers, farm machinery, and metalwork for the agricultural industry. Exports include cotton, natural gas, and oil products. Turkmenistan has vast reserves of oil and natural gas, and arrangements to export gas and oil through pipelines are primary concerns of

[136] Hodjamukhamedov, N. et al.: **Carpets and Carpet Products of Turkmenistan.** Ashkhabad 1983, 139 CP of marginal quality, pp.152.

the government and foreign investors.[137] Turkmenistan's economic situation has deteriorated somewhat since 1990. It has experienced severe economic problems like Poverty, crime, unemployment, and drug abuse has raised sharply among young male Turkmens even then the overall standard of living has not dropped as dramatically as it has in other former Soviet republics. Turkmenistan's low industrial and manufacturing production has led to a high reliance on imported foodstuffs and consumer goods. Economic reforms have been modest, and the majority of businesses remain state-owned. Government provides subsidies on basic food products so that people can afford to survive despite inflation.[138] One of the most important modifications in economic policy took effect in early 1993 when President Niyazov decreed that natural gas, water, and electricity would be supplied virtually free of charge to all homes in Turkmenistan for an indefinite period. Gasoline and other fuels also remain cheap, relative to neighbouring republics. Such economic stability has been possible because Turkmenistan has a comparatively small population and it is rich in important resources such as natural gas and oil. A recent study by the United Nations revealed that cultural norms in Turkmenistan, regarding employment appropriate for men or women, have not changed dramatically since independence.[139] Women still identify nursing, education, art, and culture as jobs suitable for themselves, if they choose to work outside the home. Women are very unlikely to pursue employment in areas dominated by men: petroleum industry and energy production, transportation, and communications. There is a latent expectation that women will continue to opt for the role of homemaker and housekeeper, in lieu of work outside family roles.

Education

Most of the Central Asian population was illiterate. A religious Muslim education for boys from rich families was the only known form of education

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137 Ahmed Rashid, op.cit., pp.60-61.

138 Chittaranjan Senapati, "Industrial Development in Central Asia since 1991*", Contemporary Central Asia*, Vol.7, (2003), pp.39-40.

139 *United Nations Development Programme*, Human Development Report 2001, www.undp.org/hdr2001

Local ethnic and religious communities ran their own schools, which provided basic elementary-mostly religious-education, similar to other pre-modern Muslim societies. Education was conducted in formal schools associated with mosques or in private houses of educated or wealthy residents; there were no formal requirements for teachers. Usually a school was attended by about a dozen children. Teachers did not receive a regular salary but were supported by gifts from parents in the form of weekly donations of food and money. Additionally, the teachers received gifts of clothes when a child finished a book. Education was aimed at the transmission of basic literacy and proper models of behavior. The educational process was characterized by a rigorous discipline based on severe corporal punishment and rote memorization of texts. The education of a Central Asian boy began when his father took him to a teacher and left him behind with ritual phrase common throughout the Islamic world, "You can beat him as long as you don't kill him; the meat is yours but the bones are ours." The schools had no formal division of classes or examinations. After memorizing the alphabet, the students were introduced to selected verses of the Quran. All instruction was oral. Rarely, students stayed in school for the duration because families could not afford to remove their boys from productive agricultural labor for a long period. Schools for girls in many ways parallel those for boys. A similar kind of instruction was provided by the Imams' wives and daughters.[140] The pupils acquired knowledge of the basic elements of culture through into action with learned old man. Practical knowledge and skills were received in the context of work. Artisans were trained in craft guilds. The master usually took an apprentice at age 12 and taught him the secrets of the trade during the next several years. The master was also responsible for teaching the child rules of proper behavior and knowledge about Muslim Law and mysticism if he was literate. Good behavior meant that the apprentice was not rude to his master, did not walk in front of him, sit down without out his permission, nor address him by his name.

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140 Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p.27.

Education in religious schools was attended to produce a certain understanding of Islam. Students did not have access to the sources and never studied the Quran, the traditions of the prophet, nor even the jurisprudence. Instructions were based on commentaries produced by scholars and approved by the rulers, publishing existed on a low level, and Islamic education was in an even worse state.

After Independence, the literacy rate of Turkmenistan is 99.7%.[141] According to Soviet government statistics, literacy in Turkmenistan was nearly universal in 1991. Experts considered the overall level of education to be comparable to the average for the Soviet republics. According to the 1989 census, 65.1% of the population aged fifteen and older had completed secondary school, compared with 45.6 % in 1979. In the same period, the percentage of citizens who had completed a higher education rose from 6.4 to 8.3 %. Education is free of charge. Formal schooling begins with kindergarten (*bagcha*) and primary school (*mekdep*)[142] From the eighth grade students are tested and directed into technical, continuing, and discontinuing tracks. Some students adjust to the workforce after completing the tenth grade, while others leave in the ninth grade to enter a trade or technical school. Although the education system in Turkmenistan retains the centralized structural framework of the Soviet system, significant modifications are underway, partly as a response to national redefinition, but mainly because of the government's attempts to produce a highly skilled work force to promote Turkmenistan's participation in international commercial activities. Reforms also include cultural goals such as the writing of a new history of Turkmenistan, the training of multilingual cadres able to function in Turkmen, English, Russian, and the implementation of alphabet reform in schools. Turkmenistan's educational establishment is funded and administered by the state.[143] The Ministry of Education is

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[141] Ibid.,
[142] United Nations Development Programme Report 2011, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_literacy_rate
[143] M. Mobin Shorish, *Traditional Islamic Education in Central Asia Prior to 1917*, Chantel Lemercier Quelquejay, Gills Veinstien and S. Enders Wimbush, Leuven Paris, Editions Peeters, 1986, p.322

responsible for secondary education and supervises about 1,800 schools. Secondary schools have 66,192 teachers who serve 831,000 students. Thirty-six secondary schools specialize in topics relevant to their ministerial affiliation. The primary and secondary systems are being restructured according to Western models, including shorter curricula, more vocational training, and human resource development. Even then, in Niyazov's period the education system is in a shambles. Funding has been dramatically reduced, as has the length of study, and curricula are increasingly dominated by ideology. Thirteen years of ruinous "reforms" leave the country facing a bleak future, as few students have been educated to a useful level. In December 2005, Niyazov suggested that all educational institutes should be funded by local, not central governments, a disastrous step given the dismal state of most local economies.[144] According to the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR), the number of schools has fallen since independence from 1,800 to 1,705, while the number of pupils has grown from 700,000 to one million. At the same time, institutes of higher education have increased from seven to sixteen, though students studying in university in 2006 – not counting those engaged in the required two years of "practical work" – are one sixth of the number in 1993.[145] Specialized schools have also been hard hit. The Technical College in Turkmenbashy shut down in 1994, and medical schools in Mary, Turkmenabat and Nebitdag admitted their last students in 2003. The three-year agricultural schools are being replaced by one-year schools.[146] Ideological education based on the *Ruhnama* is all pervasive in the curriculum.[147] University education has been reduced from five years to two, plus the requirement that students spend

144 "*Education in Turkmenistan",* Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR), November 2006, p.5.
145 Ibid., pp.9-10.
146 Ibid., pp.7-8.
147 "Education", TIHR, op. cit., pp.14-15. Pupils are expected to study the *Ruhnama* one hour per week in the second grade, two hours per week in eighth grade, for example, "Education", TIHR, op. cit., p.16. At the same time, "Turkmenistan's Ministry of Education encourages the practice of studying all school subjects through the prism of Niyazov's works, primarily [the] *Ruhnama*, which is referred to as the holy book…[of] the country", ibid., p.13. Thus, from a math exercise: "The chapter 'The Turkmen nation' of the sacred *Ruhnama* consists of 60 pages, and the chapter 'The State of the Turkmen' sixteen pages more.", ibid., p.14. The *Ruhnama*'s influence on the curriculum thus may be greater than the hours specifically assigned for its study alone imply.

two years working in the private sector before receiving a diploma.[148] On 6 July 2003, Niyazov ordained that only those students who could submit proof of two-years prior work experience could be admitted to university. Part-time study and evening classes have been abolished.[149] Fourteen privately funded Turkish lycees offer a much higher level of education but their tuition fees are a problem for many. Ashgabat has a single Turkmen-Russian school, with 600 places, whose curriculum is based on that of the Russian Ministry of Education.[150] Some turn to study abroad to escape the suffocating ideology and acquire genuine knowledge and skills, with the U.S., Turkey, Kyrgyzstan, and especially Russia, popular destinations. Yet, those who opt for this alternative face hurdles. Costs can be prohibitively high. While some exchange programs provide financial support, participants may experience difficulties getting re-admitted to local educational institutions once they return.[151] Moreover, in 2004, all foreign-earned degrees were declared invalid;[152] consequently, many qualified graduates stay away. Still, study abroad remains popular. "What's the option?", a former aid worker asked. "You either send your children abroad to get a halfway decent education, or you just let them rot in the system".[153] A local alternative is offered by small, private, commercial training organizations, which have sprung up in cities all over the country. With certificates from the ministry of education, these centers offer supplementary training in such fields as English and computer skills. At relatively affordable prices – usually around $50 for a ten-week course – they have become a popular choice for parents seeking to boost their children's education.[154] Nevertheless, there are only limited opportunities for escape from Turkmenistan's stultifying official education system, the long-term consequences of which could be dire for the country. As a former aid worker put it, "a lot of time in the universities is just

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148 Crisis Group interview, April 2006, Cited in "Turkmenistan after Niyazov" International Crisis Group 12 February, 2007, www.crisisgroup.org
149 "Education", TIHR, op. cit., p.8.
150 "Turkmenistan: Learning the Turkish Way", IWPR, 11 July 2005, www.iwpr.net; "Education", TIHR, op. cit., pp.6-7.
151 Crisis Group interview, August 2006, op cit.
152 "Education", TIHR, op. cit., p.19.
153 Crisis Group interview, August 2006, op cit.
154 Ibid.

spent preparing for holidays and festivals. The students come out with no knowledge at all they're just used to dancing and putting up bunting".[155]

The Family

Prior to Soviet rule, the extended family was the basic and most important social and economic unit among the Turkmen. Grouped according to clan, small bands of Turkmen families lived as nomads in their traditional regions and consolidated only in time of war or celebration. In most cases, the families were entirely self-sufficient, subsisting on their livestock and at times on modest agricultural production. For some groups, raiding sedentary populations, especially the Iranians to the south, was an important economic activity. Although Soviet power brought about fundamental changes in the Turkmen family structure, many traditional aspects remain. Families continue to be close-knit and often raise more than five children. Although no longer nomadic, families in rural areas are grouped according to clan or tribe, and it is the rule rather than the exception for the inhabitants of a village to be of one lineage. Here, it is common for sons to remain with their parents after marriage and to live in an extended one-story clay structure with a courtyard and an agricultural plot.[156] In both rural and urban areas, respect for elders is great. Whereas homes for the elderly do exist in Turkmenistan, Turkmen are conspicuously absent from them and it is almost unheard of for a Turkmen to commit his or her parent to such an institution because grandparents are considered integral family members, sources of wisdom and spirituality. They are intensely attached to their families, and their parents exercise an enormous amount of control over their children's lives. Families are very close-knit, and siblings share clothing, use each other's things, and are constantly in each other's private space. Sons will usually live near their parents for their entire lives. Arranged weddings are still quite common, and parental control extends far beyond childhood for many Turkmen. Relatives assist one another

[155] Ibid.
[156] Mary Buckley, op. cit., p.276.

emotionally as well as materially and their assistance is expected to extend corruption or nepotism in the workplace. Time off is often spent with the family, and people without families or who live away from home are viewed as unfortunate. A Turkmen well-known proverb is "He who leaves his country will weep for seven years. He who leaves his tribe will weep for a lifetime."

The extended family is the central social unit of Turkmenistan's society. Turkmen culture is traditionally patriarchal.[157] This reflects the Islamic influence which assigns a leadership role in the family to fathers and elder male figures. Women, on the other hand, are under the authority of a husband or father and are expected to maintain the household. This includes food preparation, childcare, and spinning, dying, and weaving of wool. Within the household, parents are strict disciplinarians. Women leave their families to live with their husband's family in his father's household. Although the women leave, their brothers act as the link to their birth families after they marry and become members of another household. It is common for brothers to be the only family members who visit, as they are the ones responsible for the safety of their sisters. Large families are considered a blessing and female infertility would be a reason for divorce. Turkmen custom in this case is for a man to marry another woman and leave the first wife. When a man is in his 30s, he leaves his father's household with his wife and children and forms a household of his own. He takes with him part of his father's wealth and establishes his own independent livelihood.[158] If he is the youngest male in his family, he will have the honour and responsibility for taking care of his parents when they are old.

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[157] Blackwell, Carole. *Tradition and Society in Turkmenistan: Gender, Oral Culture and Song.* Family Relationships, p.49. 2001.

[158] MaryLee ,*Cultures of the World: Turkmenistan.* Knowlton, p.73–89. 2006. White Plains, NY: Marshal Cavendish Press.

Role and Status of Elders

In Turkmenistan, as in other Central Asian countries, respect for elder persons in or outside the family is profound. Elder care facilities do exist in Turkmenistan, but Turkmen are conspicuously absent from them. It would be disgraceful for a Turkmen family to commit its elders to a nursing or elder home. Grandparents are considered integral family members, sources of wisdom and spirituality. Turkmen children are expected to show unconditional obedience to their parents who are presumed to know best. Unruly or disobedient children bring shame to the family.[159] Moreover, the elected elder in a rural district is the mayor. He presides over the *gengesh* or village council that is also an elected body. Among his duties are the:1) regulation of all enterprises in the area; 2) maintenance of economic, social, and cultural relations in the area; and 3) management of human resources in the area. Police and security officials operating in a rural area are likely to coordinate with the office of the *archyn* (a village elder who functions as a mayor), since he is usually acquainted with the history of each family in his area. Likewise, a stranger who is looking for assistance is likely to be referred to this elected official for help.

Gender Issues

Male children are welcomed in the family with great fanfare, as they will be the ones their parents rely on once they advance into old age and are too old to work. Girls, by contrast, are viewed as temporary members of the family whose place will be the household into which they marry. Long-standing taboos against male–female socialization mean that for girls, their brothers are the only male peers with whom they will have close contact until they marry. Male children have greater freedom to move about the community as they grow up; girls are to stick close to their mothers. As they mature sexually, they are expected to guard their virginity. In this, they are assisted by the family, which

[159] Country Studies. Library of Congress. "Turkmenistan: Social Structure." 1996. http://countrystudies.us/turkmenistan/11.htm

shelters them from conduct with males outside the family that might compromise their honour.[160] They should understand that body language could be interpreted differently in Turkmenistan than back home. Women in general are expected to be shy and non-confrontational, and to avoid making eye contact with men, especially in rural areas. Men should understand that being alone with a Turkmen woman, visiting her at her home, or showing any kind of affection towards her in public could damage her reputation and marriage ability. Walking together is a major form of courting in Turkmenistan, so they are very careful to whom they are seen on the street with. In Turkmenistan, the lines that separate the sexes are much clearer than they are in the west, and there is no such thing as "dating" in the western sense of things. Mixed activities are always in groups, and even in urban areas, a girl who goes out alone with a young man is very much in danger of losing her reputation as a "good girl." It is common at even large gatherings for groups of men and women to sit in separate sections of the room. It is also fact that the patriarchal nature of Turkmen culture is more obvious than in rural areas. Yet, in spite of the leadership role of men, the role of women in rural Turkmenistan is different from that of other Islamic societies. Women tend to embrace a traditional female role, clearly separate from that of men, including childcare, cooking, cleaning, care of cows and sheep, spinning, dying, and weaving of wool. Therefore, women frequently miss out opportunities for education that would permit them to enter the job market.[161] During the summer, the world of men and women come together in the cotton fields where the entire family including children help to bring in the annual harvest. However, the traditional nomadic lifestyle demanded a strict division of labor. Men hunted, tended the herds, and kept the horses, while women cooked, tended the home, and made the textiles. Today, women usually tend the house and men have more free time, but employment is not restricted by gender. Women work as teachers, academics, librarians, authors, administrators, scientists, linguists, and salespeople, and

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160 Blackwell, Carole, op.cit., p.49

161 Dinara Alimdjanova, *Gender Aspects of Agricultural, and Rural Employment: Application for Uzbekistan*, Paper Presented at the FAO-IFAD-ILO, Rome, 31 March 2010, p.3.

there are nine female members of the *Majlis*. Textiles are made primarily by women, while heavy industry is male-oriented, as are the livestock industries and transportation. Even then, Women are expected to be reserved and non-confrontational, but have never been subjected to seclusion or required to wear face veils.[162]

Marriage

Turkmen usually marry in their early twenties, although some delay marriage to begin a career. The traditional expectation is to have a baby within the first year of marriage, and the groom's parents can demand a divorce if they suspect that the bride is infertile. The marriage celebration, together with other life-cycle events, possesses great importance in Turkmen society. In rural areas especially, special matchmakers (sawcholar) often arrange marriages. Aside from finding the right match in terms of social status, education, and other qualities, the matchmakers invariably must find couples of the same clan and locale. Most couples have known each other beforehand and freely consent to the marriage arrangement but the preference is given to the elders. Since marriages are usually arranged, bride selection and planning may begin earlier. President Niyazov in 2005 scrapped his 2001 edict imposing a USD 50,000 penalty on foreigners who married native Turkmenistani women outside Turkmenistan. The decree was originally meant to stem the tide of cross-border elopement and kidnapping, i.e., men living in ethnic enclaves in border countries like Uzbekistan who enticed women across the border for marriage, thereby avoiding payment of a dowry.[163]

Divorce

Divorce among Turkmen is relatively rare. One important custom still practiced in Turkmenistan is the bride price (*kalong*). Depending on region

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[162] O'Donovan, Story of Merv, pp.307-308; Moser, A Travers l'Asie Centrale, pp.330-331.

[163] Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty. "Turkmenistan: Marriage Gets Cheaper as Turkmenbashi Drops $50,000 Foreigner's Fee". 10 June 2005. http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/06/c2984fe7-fbca-4bc1- 98d3 d5d4b42bfded.html

and a family's wealth, the bride's family may demand huge sums of money from the groom in return for the bride's hand in marriage. Article 25 of the Turkmenistan Constitution of 1992, which provides guidance on marriage, families, and children, only speaks of men and women who "reach the age of marriage." In practice, this has come to mean the old Soviet era standard of 16 years for females and 18 for males. However, since marriages are usually arranged, bride selection and planning may begin earlier. President Niyazov in 2005 scrapped his 2001 edict imposing a USD 50,000 penalty on foreigners who married native Turkmenistani women outside Turkmenistan. The decree was originally meant to stem the tide of cross-border elopement and kidnapping, i.e., men living in ethnic enclaves in border countries like Uzbekistan who enticed women across the border for marriage, thereby avoiding payment of a dowry. Generally, the material investment that a man's family contributes to the marriage of a son insures abiding family concern for the success of the marriage. In addition, the scrutiny given to the character of the bride or groom and to their individual families aims at eliminating future impediments to the well-being of the new family. Although divorce is rare in Turkmenistan, the constitution does guarantee the right of divorce to men and women. This is often not a realistic recourse for women simply because they are usually economically dependent on their husbands. A woman could theoretically allege spousal abuse on the part of her husband. However, she would do so, if she were well educated and had the means to support herself and her minor children. Two possible grounds for divorce initiated by a man would be infertility or infidelity on the part of the wife. In a divorce of this sort, the husband would retain custody of the children. Divorce proceedings brought by either partner are permissible under Islamic tradition and old Turkmen tribal law. There are no reliable judicial statistics on the number or nature of divorces in Turkmenistan.[164]

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164 International Women's Rights Action Watch. "Country Reports: Turkmenistan. Prepared for the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women". May 2010, http://iwraw.igc.org/publications/countries/turkmenistan.htm

Role and Status of Women

The role of women in Turkmen society has never conformed to Western stereotypes about "Muslim women." Although a division of labor has existed and women usually were not visible actors in political affairs outside the home, Turkmen women never wore the veil or practiced strict seclusion.[165] They generally possessed a host of highly specialized skills and crafts, especially those connected with the household and its maintenance. During the Soviet period, women assumed responsibility for the observance of some Muslim rites to protect their husbands' careers. Many women entered the work force out of economic necessity, a factor that disrupted some traditional family practices and increased the incidence of divorce. At the same time, educated urban women entered professional services and careers with the result a new surprising trend among Turkmen women in urban centers is seen. They feel compelled to have children but not a husband as they cannot find a man to whom they think would make a good husband and prefer to be without one. Polygamy was never common among the Turkmen. The Turkmen government established civil laws of inheritance; however, they prefer to follow *Adat* (custom) when possible, even over *Sarigat* (Islamic law).[166] Traditionally the youngest son would remain with his parents inheriting the home upon their deaths; daughters would marry and move into their husband's home. Mothers and other female family members play an important role in a child's life. Male babies are circumcised in a special ceremony led by a *mullah*, usually attended only by close family members.[167] Child rearing is primarily the responsibility of women, but elders and older siblings have authority over children. Fathers tend to take more responsibility for raising boys and teaching them about labor, ethics, and etiquette. Mothers oversee girls' education in homemaking. A young

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165 Nikki Keddie, "Introduction: Deciphering Middle Eastern Women's History", in *Women in Middle History:Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*, (ed.) Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron (New Haven, 1991), p.4.

166 Islamic inheritance law stipulates that daughters inherit a share of family property, although this share is smaller than that of their brothers. Among the Turkmen, as among many other tribal groups, women were generally excluded from inheriting. Keddie, "Deciphering Middle Eastern Women's History," p.5; and William Irons, *The Yomut Turkmen: A Study of Social Organization among a Central Asian Turkic-Speaking Population* (Ann Arbor, 1975), p.93.

167 Certain superstitions surround infants: non-family members should not see a newborn for the first forty days, and the Quran should be placed near the cradle to help and protect the baby so that it will never be "alone".

girl spends a great deal of time preparing the items necessary for marriage and practices cooking, sewing, embroidery, and textile making.[168] Historically women were considered equitable partners. The last independent Turkmen leader was a woman, Guljamal Hatun, who succeeded her husband Nurberdi Han. Under the Soviet system, women began to work outside the home and it became more common for women to attain higher education. Women have retained the right to education and work. In fact, many of the students who have taken part in programs in Turkey and the West have been female.[169] There are unacknowledged inequalities which are difficult to document. The traditional role of homemaker and caregiver prevents some women from seeking roles outside of the home. There are anecdotal reports of domestic violence, but it is not spoken of publicly.

Religion

Long before monotheistic Islam became the religion of the land, inhabitants of the area were practicing shamanism.[170] Around 300 B.C.E., Persian Parthian invaders brought Zoroastrianism.[171] Artifact such as excavated Chinese coins and rock carvings show that the ancient city of Merv (present day Mary) in southern Turkmenistan had become a centre of West Asian Buddhist activity by the 3rd century C.E.[172] Elements of early faiths such as ancestor worship and attachment to talismans and amulets later made their way into local Islamic tradition. Arab explorers during the 8th and 9th centuries note that the people of Turkmenistan were worshipers of lunar divinities as well. Islam in Turkmenistan was not well established until the 10th century. In spite of Shi'a

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168 Sharon Bastug and Nuran Hortacsu, "The Price of Value: Kinship, Marriage, and Meta-narratives of Gender in Turkmenisatan", in *Gender and Identity Construction: Women of Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Turkey*, ed. Feride Acar and Ayse Gunes-Ayata (Leiden, 2000), p.118-21; Irons, *Yomut Turkmen*, p.163-64.

169 Strengthening Income-Generating Opportunities for Rural Women in Turkmenistan; Review of present socio-economic conditions in rural areas, June 4 2010, http://www.unescap.org/rural/doc/women/IV.Turkmenistan.PDF, p.37-38

170 Shamanism is the belief that a priest, or shaman, can mediate between the physical and spiritual worlds and bring about cures and transformations.

171 Zoroastrianism was an ancient faith practiced in parts of western Asia. Its leader, Zoroaster or Zarathustra, taught the eternal struggle between forces Ahura Mazda, the shining Lord Wisdom, and Ahriman, the evil Prince of Destruction.

172 Transoxiana Journal Libre de Estudios Orientales. Compareti, Dr. Matteo. "Buddhist Activity in Pre-Islamic Persia According to Literary Sources and Archaeology." August 2010, http://www.transoxiana.org/12/compareti-iranian_buddhism.php

Persia next door, the only form of Islam to take hold in Central Asia was Sunni Islam.[173] In Turkmenistan; Islam has incorporated elements of ancestor and saint worship as well as Sufi[174] practices. Shrine frequent visits to the graves of venerated ancestors and saint-like figures called *gombashy*[175] are very common in rural areas throughout the country. Pilgrims can be seen offering votive prayers surrounding the shrines, often in the presence of children or infirm relatives in need of cures or fertility. The *gombashy* are usually members of non-Turkmen groups or *vlat* (*ovlat*)[176] that are said to have descended directly from early Arab caliphs. Present day members of *vlat* are still esteemed among rural Turkmen and their members are frequently invited to lend blessings to a communal celebration.[177] They have long been regarded as practicing a form of "folk Islam"[178] rather than the strict variant observed in Middle Eastern countries. This determination is based partly on the number of rituals Turkmen perform which do not have their origins in Islam. Shrine or holy site worship remains an important part of daily life despite the fact that veneration of saints (in the place of God) is not permitted according to Islamic teaching. Many Turkmen, particularly residents of rural areas, continue to pray for miracles at shrines through appeals to its patron saint.[179]

Places of Worship

The list of great Turkmen mosques of the past and present is long. Among the monuments to the Islamic past are the 15th century mosque of Sayid Jamalu din in Anau, and the Mausoleum of the 13th century mystic Najmeddin Kubra, which has become a destination for pilgrims and the holiest shrine in Kunya

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173 Sunni Muslims believe in being guided by the Quran, the *sunna* (practices of the prophets), and they are urged to select their prayer leaders (imams), from the most upright and pious Muslims. Shi'a Muslims on the other hand believe in leadership through lineage and descent from the Prophet Muhammad's (s.a.w) son-in-law, Hazrat Ali(r.a).

174 Sufi – a doctrine of Islamic mysticism that seeks communication with God through meditation and dance, e.g., whirling dervishes.

175 *Gombashy* means "head of the cemetery".

176 *Ovlat* from the Turkmen word meaning "holy".

177 Tyson, David, 'Shrine Pilgrimage in Turkmenistan as a Means to Understand Islam Among the Turkmen', University of Georgia. *Central Asian Monitor*,1997. http://www.uga.edu/islam/turkmen.html

178 Folk religion consists of ethnic or regional religious customs under the umbrella of an organized religion, but outside of official doctrine and practices

179 Tyson, David, op. cit., http://www.uga.edu/islam/turkmen.html

Urgench. Modernity has brought two famous mosques, both of which may be visited by non-Muslims. They are the Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque outside Ashgabat, built by President Niyazov to commemorate victims of the great 1948 earthquake, and the Geokdepe Saparmurat Haji Mosque west of Ashgabat.[180] Many, but not all, places of worship in Turkmenistan may be visited. As a rule, Russian Orthodox churches may be visited by practicing Christians. Islamic shrines, often found inside cemeteries, are among places that would be off limits to non-Muslim travelers. In any case, those wanting to visit a mosque should inquire in advance when it might be visited. A few rules of etiquette apply to visit religious places like mosques. First, they should not be visited during prayer times. All visitors should be modestly dressed. For men this means clean, pressed trousers and long sleeve shirts; for women, long skirts and long sleeve blouses with a head cover or scarf. When entering a mosque the shoes, but not the socks, should be removed. Inside a mosque, visitors should not touch any ceremonial objects or copies of the Quran. There is no photography, loud talking, laughing, eating, or smoking in any place of worship. Finally, one should never walk in front of an individual who is praying since it invalidates his prayer.

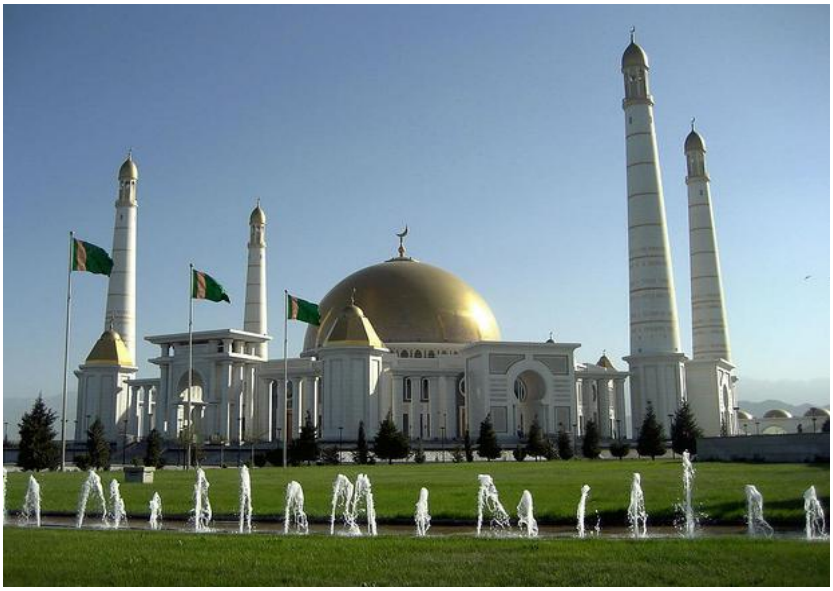

Fig 6: (Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque)
Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/davidstanleytravel/5731109818/

[180] Oriental Express Central Asia. "About Turkmenistan: Monumental Sites." http://turkmenistan.orexca.com/catalog/53/?p=2&page=0

Fig 7: Geokdepe Saparmurat Haji Mosque
Source: http://www.trekearth.com/gallery/Asia/Turkmenistan/West/Ahal/Ashgabat/photo577833.htm

Religion and Government

Although the constitution of Turkmenistan identifies the country as a secular state, President Niyazov during his long tenure tended to define the national heritage of the country as Islamic. His successor, Berdimuhammedov, has not altered this stance and he, too, continues to refer to religious freedoms gained following independence. To support his claim of religious freedom, the President can point to the construction of 398 mosques since 1991, all built with government subsidy. Nonetheless, the fear of radical or political Islam has driven the government to establish the Council of Religious Affairs, which reports directly to the President. All Islamic seminaries or *madrassas* must be registered and their clerics licensed by the government. In a show of governmental control of religious bodies, institutions such as the Theological Faculty of Ashgabat have been downgraded and the number of their faculty members and students has been reduced.[181] To demonstrate national compliance with international Islamic practice, the government routinely sanctions one plane, containing 188 pilgrims, to attend the annual *hajj*

[181] ReligiousTolerance.org. Forum 18 News Service. "Religious Intolerance in Turkmenistan. Part 1".2010, http://www.religioustolerance.org/rt_turkm.htm

pilgrimage to Mecca in spite of the quota of 4,500 set by authorities in Saudi Arabia.[182]

The first non-Islamic faith to be recognized was Turkmenistan's largest minority religion, Russian Orthodox Christianity. Other smaller minorities have had considerable difficulty in attaining official recognition. This is because the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, last amended in 1996, requires all non-Islamic congregations to be officially registered. Registration requires a membership of 500 in any given sub district. Minorities other than the Russian Orthodox have had difficulty attaining congregation status. For this reason, followers of the Baha'i faith have been particularly affected, as have Jehovah's Witnesses and Georgian Armenian Christians. All had applied for recognition in the 1990s. In May 2005, they were registered with several other minority faiths. The small Jewish community opted for a different route. They never applied for official registry and their religious activities have never been questioned.[183]

Religion in Daily Life

In the 70 years of Soviet rule, the focus of religious activity shifted from the mosque to the home. Turkmens traditionally have no strong tradition of mosque attendance, preferring instead to pray at home or at shrines. Although Islam is an integral part of their cultural heritage, not many are fully aware of the elements of their faith. Some are even nonbelievers who support religious revival only as a part of national revival. The impressive mosques that have been built since independence have come about through government endowments and not through the finances of local congregations.[184] Turkmens who do believe and practice their faith are obligated to the five pillars of

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[182] Boucek, Christopher, 'Berdymukhammedov Burnishes Muslim Credentials on Visit to Saudi Arabia' Central Asia-Caucasus Institute,18 April 2010. http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4594

[183] U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. '*Turkmenistan, International Religious Freedom Report*', 2010. http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90236.htm

[184] Country Studies, "Turkmenistan.- Society." Mongabay.com. http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country_studies/turkmenistan/SOCIETY.html

Islam.[185] Muslims observe congregational prayers at noon on Friday and that day tends to be somewhat like a Sunday for Christians.[186] So far as personal life is concerned, Whether personal faith is weak or strong, Islamic traditions still shape Turkmen social interaction and family life. In terms of male and female interactions, this means a girl guards her virginity and remains with her family until she marries. There is no dating before marriage, and unmarried females avoid being seen in the company of males outside their families, lest their honour be questioned.

Religious demography

Having an area of 188,457 square miles (488,100 km^2), Turkmenistan has a population of five million. As per the Government's most recent census report of 1995, ethnic Turkmen constitute 77% of the population. Minority ethnic populations include Uzbeks (9.2%), Russians (6.7%), and Kazakhs (2%). Armenians, Azeris, and other ethnic groups comprise the remaining 5.1%. The major religion is Islam, and Russian Orthodox Christians constitute the largest religious minority. Since independence, there has been a tightly controlled revival of Islam. During the Soviet era, there were only four mosques, which are subsequently raised to 398 in the contemporary times. Ethnic Turkmen, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Baloch living in Mary province are predominantly Sunni Muslim. There are small pockets of Shi'a Muslims, many of whom are ethnic Iranians, Azeris, or Kurds living along the border with Iran and in Turkmenbashy (Krasnovodsk). Restrictive government control, indigenous Islamic culture, and 70 years of Soviet rule have meant that traditional mosque-based Islam does not play a dominant role in society. Local interpretations of Islam place a heavy premium on rituals associated with birth, marriage, and death ("sadakas"), featuring music and dancing that more traditional Muslims

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185 Declaration of faith (*shahada*), prayer five times daily (*salat*), charity (*zakat*), fasting during the month of Ramadan (*saum*), and pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca (*hajj*). They must accept Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) to be the last of the prophets which began with Adam (a.s) and included Ibrahim (a.s), Musa (a.s) and Isa (a.s) Moreover, they must believe that Quran is the divine word of God as revealed to Muhammad (s.a.w)) by the angel, Gabriel (a.s).

186 Florida State University, 'Understanding Islam and the Muslims' http://mailer.fsu.edu/~mkasapog/msa/islam.htm

view as unorthodox. Together with shrine pilgrimage, such rituals play a significant role in local Muslim expression of Islam than regular prayer at mosques.

While the 1995 census indicated that ethnic Russians comprised almost 7% of the population, their subsequent emigration to Russia and elsewhere has reduced considerably this proportion. Most ethnic Russians and Armenians are Christian. Practicing Russian Christians are generally members of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). There are 13 Russian Orthodox churches, three of which are in Ashgabat. A priest resident in Ashgabat leads the ROC within the country, serving under the religious jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Archbishop in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. There are no Russian Orthodox seminaries. Ethnic Russians and Armenians also comprise a significant percentage of members of unregistered religious congregations; ethnic Turkmen appear to be increasingly represented among these groups as well. There are small communities of the following unregistered denominations: the Roman Catholic Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, and several evangelical Christian groups including "Separate" Baptists, charismatic groups, and an unaffiliated, nondenominational group. Small communities of Baha'is, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and the Hindus (Society for Krishna Consciousness) were registered with the Government, but immediately all these religions were abolished because in 1994 Turkmenistan elected its own National Spiritual Assembly however, laws passed in 1995 in Turkmenistan required 500 adult religious adherents in each locality for registration and no Baha'i community and others could meet this requirement. As of 2007, the religions had still failed to reach the minimum number of adherents to register and individuals have had their homes raided for Baha'i literature. In May 2005 the Greater Grace Church of Turkmenistan, the International Church of Christ, the New Apostolic Church of Turkmenistan, and two groups of Pentecostal Christians were able to register. A very small community of ethnic Germans, most of whom live in and around the city of Saragt, reportedly included practicing

Lutherans. Approximately one thousand ethnic Poles living in the country have been largely absorbed into the Russian community and consider themselves Russian Orthodox. According to an estimate, one thousand Jews live in the country. Most are members of such families who came from Ukraine during World War II. There are some Jewish families living in Turkmenabat, on the border with Uzbekistan, who are known as Bukharan Jews, referring to the Uzbek city of Bukhara. There were no synagogues or rabbis, and Jews continued to emigrate to Israel, Russia, and Germany; however, the Jewish population remained relatively constant.[187]

Religious Beliefs

The Turkmen state is secular. While independence inaugurated a mild surge of interest in religion, it seems mostly related to the fact that Turkmen feel their Islamic heritage to be a fundamental aspect of their identity, rather than to a widespread affinity for piety. When Arab and Persian invasions brought Islam to Central Asia (seventh–eighth centuries), all the Turkic groups convert neither at the same time nor to the same degree. Conversion to Islam depended on time and place. For example, urban centers were more likely to participate in formal rituals whereas nomadic Turks (like Turkmen) mixed aspects of Islam with elements from other practices (like the celebration of Nowruz which came from Zoroastranism) and retained much of their pre-Islamic heritage (retaining the name of the sky god *Gok* for the words blue and green). Turkmen began to convert around the tenth century. While their practices still reflect this early syncretism, even non-practicing Turkmens call themselves Muslim and see this as an integral part of their cultural identity. Religious leaders called *mullas*, or *isan* in the mystical Sufi orders, and *Qazis* interpret Islamic law but do not act as clergy. The oldest man leads the group in prayer.[188] In 1992; the government sanctioned the establishment of the *Qaziat* as the highest religious

[187] Religious demography, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Turkmenistan#Religious_demography

[188] Blackwell, Carole. *Tradition and Society in Turkmenistan: Gender, oral Culture, and Song,* Religion and Belief Patterns, p.39, 2001, Richmond, Surrey, Routledge Curzon.

authority. In divorcing itself from the Central Asian *Muftiyat*, the Turkmen leadership declared its interest in promoting Islam as an aspect of national culture. The Committee (Genes) for Religious Affairs' attachment to the Office of President affords the state oversight of religious affairs in the new state.

Religious Holidays

There are two religious holidays in the Islamic calendar: *Seker Bayramy* and *Kurban Bayramy* (also called *Gurbanlyk*). *Seker Bayramy* corresponds to *Eid ul-fitr* in the Arabic speaking Muslim world. This feast, three days in duration, marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. Muslims abstain from all drink and food as well as smoking and sexual contact from dawn to sunset during Ramadan. For the non-Muslim visitor this also means no smoking, drinking, or eating in public places during daylight hours. Most international hotels will provide travelers with meals and beverages that may be consumed at designated areas inside the hotel or in guest rooms. Muslims make up for the austerity of daylight hours by having late evening festivities and entertainment. To permit late night activities, the 11pm evening curfew is suspended during the month of Ramadan. Colourful festivities, kitchen specialties, music, and dance characterize the *Seker Bayramy*. *Kurban Bayramy* is known to Arabs as *Eid ul-Adha*. This festival of sacrifice coincide with the high holy days of the Month of Pilgrimages, *Hajj*, is more solemn. It commemorates Ibrahim's (a.s) readiness to sacrifice his son, Isaac (a.s). Muslims view the sacrificed sheep of *Kurban Bayramy* as symbolic of the sheep that God substituted for the boy, Isaac (a.s).

CHAPTER - 3
STATE AND ISLAM IN SOVIET PERIOD

Birth and Formation of Soviet Union

For centuries, **tsars** ruled Russia. This period ended during the Russian revolution of 1917. The **events** changed Russia **completely** and brought the people new forms of **government**.[189] Russian people were treated very badly during the rule of the tsars. At the end of the 19th century, many people in the countryside were peasants**.** They had little food to eat and lived in poverty. They did not have any power either. As society changed, more and more people started living in cities. They became factory workers and turned into a new middle class.[190] They did not like the tsar and wanted more power from him. After a small rebellion in 1905 Tsar Nicholas II created a kind of parliament called the Duma.[191] However, the tsar himself was not willing to give up his power and he dissolved the Duma after a few months.[192] During World War I Russia's army lost many soldiers in their fight against the Germans.[193] The winter of 1916/17 was very harsh and many people had little food to eat and not very much fuel to heat their houses. They wanted Russia to stop the war.[194] Finally, in February 1917 large demonstrations against the tsar started in Petrograd (today's St. Petersburg). The Russian army joined the demonstrators and turned against him. Nicholas II was forced to give up.[195] After the tsar had stepped down from power the Duma set up a new government, but it could not manage the problems that Russia had. At the same time, groups of workers set up so-called "Soviets". They were first organized in St. Petersburg but quickly spread throughout the country. As the Duma's government became weaker, the power of the Soviets became stronger. Many different political groups in these Soviets fought for power. In the end, the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin, took over control. Most of the population

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189 Peter Kenez, *A History of the Soviet Union From the Beginning to the End*, This was hugely significant in regards to the illiterate peasantry or 'dark masses' who although followed their own (almost pagan rituals) had until this point held complete naive faith in Tsar Nicholas II. 7

190 Orlando Figes, 1998, *A people's tragedy: the Russian Revolution, 1891-1924*, Penguin Books, *Armenian Research Center collection*,, p.370.

191 "Duma." Encyclopaedia Britannica from Encyclopaedia Britannica 2007 Ultimate Reference Suite. (2009).

192 "Stolypin, Pyotr Arkadyevich." Encyclopædia Britannica from Encyclopædia Britannica 2007 Ultimate Reference Suite. (2009).

193 Urlanis, Boris (1971). *Wars and Population*. Moscow

194 Tames, R, *Last of the Tsars*, p.52.

195 Ibid., p.53.

liked the Bolsheviks because they promised the people "peace, land, and bread". In October 1917, the Bolsheviks took over the government in Russia and Lenin became the most powerful man in the country. All other political parties were forbidden. Under the Bolsheviks, all land was put under the control of the state. The tsar and the Russian church lost a lot of their land. The new party introduced an eight-hour workday and gave workers more control over the factories. Soldiers entered in the new Red Army. Lenin quickly pulled Russia out of World War I. He signed a treaty with the Germans at Brest-Litovsk in early 1918. Under this treaty, Russia lost about a fourth of its territory. Georgia, Ukraine and Finland became independent countries. Poland and the Baltic states fell under German control. Soon, the Bolsheviks changed their name to the Communist Party.[196] Shortly, after the end of the First World War, civil war broke out between the Bolsheviks and anti-Communist forces who wanted to have the tsar back again. These tsarist troops were called "White Russians". They received help from some foreign countries, like France, Great Britain and the USA. After three years, the Red Army won the war, the revolution that had begun a few years earlier was over.[197] Nicholas II, and his family were taken prisoners and murdered by the Communists in 1918. In 1922, Russia officially became the Soviet Union.[198]

The Russian Revolution of 1917 caused the downfall of the Russian Empire. Following the Russian Revolution, there was a struggle for power between the Bolshevik party, led by Vladimir Lenin, and the anti-communist White movement. In December 1922, the Bolsheviks won the civil war, and the Soviet Union was formed with the amalgamation of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Byelorussian Soviet

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196 Lenin, Vladimir (27) [1917]. Apresyan, Stephen. ed (in Russian). *One of the Fundamental Questions of the Revolution*. 25. Jim Riordan (4th ed.). Moscow: Progress Publishers. pp.370–77.
197 Dmitrii Volkogonov, *Lenin: A New Biography* (New York: Free Press, 1994).
198 Edvard Radzinsky, *The Last Tsar: The Life And Death Of Nicholas II* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

Socialist Republic.[199]There was general agreement that there should be a centralized government. None of the separate Republics had the right to depart from the central government dictates. However, Stalin, as People's Commissar for Nationalities, wanted to reincorporate all the republics within the RSFSR. Lenin opposed the plan because it was imperialistic. He wanted a federation of all Soviet republics as a Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The disagreements became acrimonious over the summer of 1922,[200] but there was little real difference between their proposals. Both wanted a centralized state. The sensitivity of the nationalities issue was illustrated when a senior party official, a Tartar called Mirza Said Sultan Galiev, was arrested in 1923 for advocating the formation of a pan-Turkic socialist state incorporating all Muslim peoples.[201] The central authorities sought to govern by dividing the nations. They also used the Cheka, which after 1923 became the United Main Political Administration (the OGPU) to arrest dissidents. Finally, the Red Army could be called upon to intervene.[202] The Soviet authorities encouraged native language instruction. One problem was that the vast majority of rank-and-file members of the Party were ethnic Russians. The Party tried to foster policies to induce non-ethnic Russians to join the party - the policy was known as korenizatsiya - "the planting down of roots".[203] Lenin was successful in his campaign to create a federation known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).[204] Russia that is the RSFSR, was given its own boundaries within a larger state. The significance of this only emerged in the late 1980s when Boris Yeltsin became Russian president in advance of the collapse of the

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[199] Bridget O'Laughlin (1975) *Marxist Approaches in Anthropology* Annual Review of Anthropology Vol. 4: pp.341–70 (October 2010) (doi:10.1146/annurev.an.04.100175.002013).

[200] Robert Service (Oct. 08, 2010). *Stalin: a biography*. Picador. ISBN 978-0-330-41913-0. http://books.google.com/?id=ITKUPwAACAAJ

[201] Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport, CT, and London: Praeger, 2001), p.62.

[202] Allworth (1989), 'The changing intellectual and literacy community', in Alloworth, E. (ed.), *Central Asia: 120 Years of Russian Rule*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press [1st edn. published1967 as *Central Asia: a Century of Russian Rule*], p.250.

[203] A cabinet-level government agency responsible for developing and conducting the Bolshevik policy in regard to religious and ethnic minorities. Joseph Stalin was the first head of the Commissariat for Nationalities when it was created immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917. This position was Stalin's first government-level appointment.

[204] Arne Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, England and Hampshire, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.154.

USSR. The constitution of the USSR was ratified by the First All-Union Congress of Soviets on 31st December, 1922.[205]

Soviet Nation Building

After defeating foreign intervention in 1921 to 1923 and failing to spark social revolutions in Europe, the Soviet communists switched their attention to socialist developments in the East. The power and unity of a centralized Soviet government was seen by the Moscow Bolsheviks as a necessity, and the Red Army was considered as a proper tool to bring indigenous governments on the territory of the former empire in conformity with the Soviet doctrine.[206] The Bolsheviks waned to consolidate all of Turkistan under Soviet control by ordering an economic union of the three republics. For this purpose, two parallel institutions were created to rule the region. The Central Asian Bureau, which worked as an intermediary between the central committee and the regional parties, supervised the political parties of Bokhara, Turkistan, and Khorezm and communicated conditions in the field to Moscow. The powerful Central Asian Economic Council was the Central Bureau's companion agency. The council distributed cash, credit, and access to industries for new republics and spent most of 1922 -1923 unifying the economies of the people's republics of Khorezm and Bokhara with that of Soviet Turkistan – although, formally , these republics remained outside of the Soviet state. At the end of 1923, the economies of the three Central Asian republics were merged, and the Soviet authorities prepared for the complete dissolution of the three Turkistani republics and the incorporation of new Soviet Socialist Republics of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan into the Soviet Union. The efforts to install identical Soviet legal systems, school, land relations, and government structures in khorezm and Bokhara were all intended to smooth the way for a complete incorporation. For this purpose, the Bolsheviks placed trusted local people in high- level offices. Following major communist principles, the authorities established a state monopoly on the cotton trade, closed farmers

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[205] Crile, George. *Charlie Wilson's War: The Extraordinary Story of the Largest Covert Operation in History*. Atlantic Monthly Press. ISBN 978-0-87113-854-5. http://books.google.com/?id=juBxr41_c64C

[206] Allworth (1989), op. cit., p.250.

markets and bazaars, prohibited individual trade, and introduced numerous labour duties.

The idea to divide Turkistan into a number of autonomous republics according to language and ethnicity was based on the assumption that the separation would help to prevent nationalist conflicts in the future and eliminate the inequality in the development of the native people .The drawing of borders was done largely by central Asian communists and reflected their senses of divergent national identities. Stalin and the commissariat of nationalities[207] favored the idea of a national territorial autonomy granted to clearly defined national groups rather than to the broad mixed territories.

The soviet administrative structure created in 1924 was aimed at providing each major ethnic group in the region with a separate administration. On October 14, 1924, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee passed a resolution on the creation of national states for the people of Central Asia. Initially, only two major union republics were created. Uzbekistan received the central part of the formed Bokhara emirate, the southern part of the old Khiva, and the regions of Samarkand, Fergana, Amu Darya, and Syr Darya, formerly included in the Russian Turkistan. The territory of Turkmenistan included Turkmen regions of Western Bokhara, Khorezm, and the former Transcaspian region. All other parts of Central Asia were established as constituent components of the Soviet republics with different degrees of autonomy. Lands traditionally occupied by the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz were defined as an autonomous republic within Russia, and the Tajiks received mountainous regions of formed Bokhara with an Iranian-speaking population. The name of Turkistan was a symbol of unification one of the reasons that this word disappeared from the map.[208]

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[207] A cabinet-level government agency responsible for developing and conducting the Bolshevik policy in regard to religious and ethnic minorities. Joseph Stalin was the first head of the Commissariat for Nationalities when it was created immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917. This position was Stalin's first government-level appointment.

[208] Allworth (1989), op. cit., p.259.

During the Soviet era, researchers thought that the creation of five separate republics in Central Asia reflected a divide-and-rule policy in response to the danger of pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism. Recently, historians recognized that the delimitation was based largely on dogmatic visions of Lenin and Stalin, who believed that all people had to go through a national stage of development before they could reach the socialist stage.[209] Among other reasons for creating these ethnically based political units, the specialists name the necessity to administer the fractious and economically backward region, and they cite economic resources and there management as a factor in the delimitation.[210] In February 1925, the first all-Uzbek congress of Soviet Socialist in Bokhara passed the Declaration on creating the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republics and formed its highest authorities. Faizulla Khodjaev became the chairman of the Republic's government, and a peasant from the Fergana Valley was elected to oversee the Central Executive Committee (formal head of state). Samarkand was chosen to be the Capital city, and the newly created Uzbek republic immediately submitted its application to join Soviet Union, which was granted soon thereafter. On March 25, 1925, the Tajik ASSR was created within the Uzbek SSR. The formation of Tajik and Uzbek Republics was done on the bases of ethnic, economic, and administrative considerations-although the primary difference between the Tajik and Uzbeks was linguistic, because there were no clear territorial lines where the different languages were spoken. The newly created Central Asian states received a certain degree of cultural and linguistic autonomy but were deprived of political and economic independence. The main goal of the state-building process in the region was to replace a unified Central Asia with smaller national republics. After turbulent years of revolutions, in 1925, Central Asia found itself again under the control of the Russian Empire-although this time the empire was ideologically driven and its name was the Soviet Union.

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[209] Shoshana Keller, op. cit., p.62.

[210] Arne Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, England and Hampshire, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.154.

Nature of the Soviet Union

The Soviet Union was a federation of fifteen national union republics. Legally, all union republics had equal status with the same degree of self-government and dependence on the federal power, having uniform systems of governing bodies and political institutions and being subordinate to those of the Soviet Union. The formal governing body in each republic was its own popularly elected legislature, the Supreme Soviet, which met twice a year for 3-day sessions to enact bills prepared between sessions by staffers. Because the Soviet doctrine did not accept the concept of the separation of powers, the Supreme Soviet elected its chairman, who was the formal head of the republic. It also appointed a prime minister and other members of the cabinet, who, according to their positions, were awarded with parliamentary seats. The government together with the staff of the Supreme Soviet influenced the formation and work of the provincial soviets and their executive committees, a kind of provincial government. The heads of these committees were the provincial soviet chairperson simultaneously. However, the real decision making authority in the republic was the central committee of the republic's communist party. The USSR constitution provided for the communist party's leading and directing role. Following this constitutional principle, the secretaries of the central committee provided guidelines to all agencies and institutions of the republics, monitored their daily activities, defined who would be elected to the soviet positions, made all key appointment in state institutions, and organized the work of the lower-level (provincial and district) party committees, which were in charge of governing their respective territories. A union republic enjoyed special rights, even if these rights were granted only theoretically. Being part of the Union, each republic had individual representation in federal authorities. All chairmen of republics' Supreme Soviet were simultaneously deputies of the Chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviets.

First secretaries of the communist party central communities in the republics had a seat in highest political organs and one of the federal legislature's chambers-the council of Nationalities-represented national units by a fixed number of delegates per unit: union republic had 25 seats each, autonomous republics had 11 seats, and autonomous provinces had 5. Formerly, each republic of the Soviet Union was a Sovereign State with its own constitution and symbols of sovereignty such as Flag, Coat of Arms, and National anthem. The USSR constitution and constitutions of each republic- that were largely identical and were passed in 1937 and 1978, following changes in the federal constitution–retained the right of free secession from the union by the republic. Usually, constitution of the republics elaborated major principles declared by the USSR constitution and customized them according to local conditions. Central USSR authorities controlled the conformity of republics' laws with the USSR legislation, whose superior role over the laws of the republics was secured by the constitution. The Soviet constitution provided for three types of jurisdiction: all union, mixed union-republican and exclusive republican, where local authorities could exercise some degree of autonomy. From time to time, the federal government transferred particular areas of industry and culture from one jurisdiction to another. For example, defense, national security, and foreign relations were always the exclusive jurisdiction of federal authorities.[211] Agriculture, health, education; public order, social security, and justice were under the joint jurisdiction of the USSR and republics. Republics were largely responsible for control over local industries, communal economies, services, and road construction.

Constitution of all five Central Asian republics proclaimed basic human rights-specifically those of women- and they contained statements about struggles with old customs, which excluded women from participating in social,

[211] Union republics never had their own armed forces, because the Soviet authorities decided all military issues uniformly. During World War II, national Uzbek and Kazakh military units were formed, but they were dissolved and outlawed after the War. In the 1980s, Central Asian republics supplied the largest share of draftees for the Soviet army, which was built according to Russian pre-revolutionary traditions. The presence of non-Russians with various religious, cultural, and language specifies created problems and complicated Soviet military capabilities.

economic, and political events. Unlike all other constitutions, the constitution of Turkmenistan specified the contract marriages, bride purchases, restricted choice of husbands, and the resistances to drawing women into study or work were punishable by laws. Constitutional provisions were implemented and national laws were adopted by the republics' Supreme Soviets. Varying in only minor details, they were based on the same principle provided by federal legislation. National codes in the area of criminal, civil, and procedural laws were issued in the late 1950s and early 1960s for the first time; before that, the RSFSR codes were applicable in the Central Asian states.

Uzbekistan was the first of all union republics to adopt a new judiciary law, criminal code, and criminal procedure code. The main features of criminal code of Uzbekistan, passed on May 29, 1959, was the decriminalization of minor offenses- such as minor theft of public property by employees- and the transfer of such cases into the jurisdiction of courts of peers, which could discipline and reprimand the defendant. Decriminalization of minor offenses was a response to Stalin's past policy of severe prosecution of all violations. On the other hand, new offenses, such as violations of an individual's freedom and interference with the privacy of home and postal communications, have been included in the code. Similar provisions were added to the codes of other Central Asian republics.[212] These provisions were never upheld, because it was impossible to sue the government-the only possible violator of privacy rights during the Soviet era- and they can be viewed as propaganda. Among other regional specifics included in the code were violations of the equal status of women, forcing women to enter a marriage, interference with the obligatory education of all children (presumably taking girls out of schools), and damaging cotton plants. This last provision was intended to increase the general sanctions against malicious damage of this especially important crop

[212] In Kazakhstan, the criminal code was adopted in July 1959. The code decriminalized national customs and traditions, making such acts as offering bride money or arranging a marriage no longer an offence. At the same time, penal sections were provided for acts such as non-fulfilment of economic plans and failure to support old parents or a wife incapable of working.

and criminalize harm done even by mere negligence in that particular section of agriculture.

Despite the fact that all republics were legally equal, federal treatment depended on the loyalty of the republic and its geopolitical and industrial status. This status defined the amount of federal investments allocated to each republic, access to international context, and the rank of the republic's leaders in the highest Soviet athourities.[213] sometimes, different geographical and cultural regions within the same republic received different treatments depending on party strength, which historically varied from one nationality to another. While the republics were part of the Soviet Union, Russian was the common language for interethnic communications and one of two official language of each republic. Russian was taught to children starting with the first grade; professional education was conducted in Russian language as well. All official documents issued by republican authorities were published in two languages- Russian and the native language of the respective republic. Local authorities avoided Russian and used the native language as a rule. At the end of the Soviet rule, almost half of the Kazakhs and Uzbeks reported fluency in Russian. In Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, which were less industrially developed, one-third of the population spoke Russian in their daily life. Moreover all important personnel decisions were made in Moscow according to the principle of dual leadership. Under this principle, a leader of the republic was a native person but always had a reliable Russian assistant to supervise and provide reports to Moscow, where most of the key positions were occupied by ethnic Russians and other Slavic people. A similar scheme was exercised at all other levels of government. In 1962, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev introduced the short-led Central Asian Bureau of the Communist party Central Committee. The bureau worked as a political economic coordinator of four Central Asian republics and one province of northern

213 Mary Mcauley, "Party recruitment and the nationalities in the USSR", *British Journal of Political Science* 10, no.4, (October 1980): p.462.

Kazakhstan. The agency restricted the authority of the republican institutions and served as an intermediary between Moscow and the republics. Soon after Khrushchev's dismissal, the bureau was closed in order to establish direct relation between the federal Center and the republics. Moscow authorities did not interfere deeply in internal affairs of the union republics as long as local leaders met planned requirements for taxation and production supply and behaved according to the rules accepted by the party. The local communist elite knew how to deal with Moscow and assured central authorities that everything in the republics was under control. The situation continued until the end of the 1980s. With some insignificant variations (depending on the political priorities of Moscow's leaders during the Soviet period), all five republics were subjected to the relatively same industrial agricultural, and social policies.

Socio-political Milieu

The communist party monopolized all aspects of social and political life in the Soviet Union, and cultural development was subjected to Communist ideology. Historical roots and national specifics were declared signs of backwardness. Russification became primary element of policies applied by Moscow toward the union republics. Michael Rywkin calls Stain's nationality policy in the region the "teacher –pupil relationship", because, in 1929, one of the Soviet leaders explained the aims of the Soviet policy in central Asia as "teaching the people of Kyrgyz Steppe, the small Uzbek cotton grower, and the Turkmen gardener the ideals of the Russian worker."[214] Native communists were required to monitor and secure ideological and political conformity, and make sure that the small Uzbek cotton growers joined the collective farm, their sons went to work in the city, their daughters took off the veil and some of their opportunistic relatives joined the communist party. Native activists were supervising their own people while the Russian communists helped them and

[214] Rywkin, (1982), *Moscow's Muslim Challenge: Soviet Central Asia*, Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, p.111.

resolved more important questions, such as the fight against counterrevolutionaries.[215]

Social and cultural reforms started with changes in school policy. The cornerstones of this policy were the opening of new schools; mandatory elementary education for all pupils; the elimination of illiteracy; the expansion of publications in native languages; and the establishment of national theaters, universities and research institutions. However, all these developments were coordinated with the ideologists in Moscow and were subject to censorship. In 1926, the government initiated school reform and started to issue permits for opening local private schools. Not ready to prohibit Islam entirely, the government did not explicitly ban the teaching of religion and required that basic sciences be taught as well. The schools were funded by the parents and were supposed to be located in warm, dry and airy buildings with sufficient amounts of desks. Students under the age of eight were not admitted. Corporal punishment was forbidden, and the teaching of arithmetic, natural science, and native languages was obligatory. Students under the age ten were permitted to study only for four hours a day, with breaks every forty minutes, while older students could study up to six hours. It was not permitted for teachers to use students' labor for their personal needs. The students from the Soviet schools were not allowed to attend religious schools. Later, only children ages fourteen and above were allowed to enroll in religious classes because the government hoped that antireligious propaganda would make them immune from Islamic influences. To restrict religious education even further, in 1920, the government limited the religious instruction of children to groups of three students. In 1929, such groups were recognized as small religious schools in secret form and were prohibited completely. Teaching religion in any government, social or private school forbidden.

[215] Ibid., p.93.

The language reform was initiated in Turkistan in 1926. The Latin alphabet and a unified mode of transcription replaced Arabic script. The reform was not completed before 1935, when the second reform changed Latin letters to the Cyrillic (Russian) alphabet. According to official explanation, the 26 letters of the Latin alphabet could not represent all 38 Turkic sounds, and the 33-letter Russian alphabet was better suited for this purpose. However, the main purposes of the reform were the further Russification of Central Asia, penetration of national languages by the Russian language, and the facilitation of the study of the Russian language by the natives. During the first decade after the reform, the percentage of the Russian vocabulary in the languages of central Asian people rose from 2 to 15%.[216] Subsequently, the number of words of Arabic or Persian origin decreased significantly.[217] The reform helped to establish closer cultural ties between Russia and central Asia and performed an ideological function of making all previously published books, mostly of religious and anti-Soviet content, obsolete and not available to the masses. This effect of the language reform coincided with the goals of antireligious campaigns that were constantly conducted during Soviet era. According to Keller, the Soviet government attacked religion because its Marxist-Leninist theory dictated an atheist society and could not tolerate any rival for power.[218] In 1927, a total attack on religion began. Usually, antireligious campaign was carried by the secret police; the campaigns physically eliminated most of the clergy and imposed strict punishments on believers. Most of the mosques were closed, so the buildings could be used for other purposes- such as warehouses, sport club, or concert halls- or they were disassembled for the building materials. The religious Organizations Act of 1929 allowed for the construction of new houses of prayer if general technical requirements were observed; however, special conditions set up by police and not specified in the law were

[216] Most of the Russian words that entered negative languages are technical or political terms or modern Soviet or International acronyms and expressions. These words usually keep their original Russian transcription but retained endings and other grammatical forms traditional for negative languages. Presently, Turkmenistan is the only Central Asian nation that switched its alphabet back to the Latin transcription. All other countries continue to use the Russian alphabet.
[217] Shoshana Keller, op. cit., p.18.
[218] Keller (2001), op. cit., p.23.

almost impossible to meet. This law prohibited all charitable activities of religious groups and introduced the direct supervision of religious activities by a person from a nearest police unit, village soviet, or city council assigned to attend all meetings of the believers. The agent was an observer with no right to participate in discussions or activities; however, he could close meetings and was obligated to do so in case of an outbreak of violence, deviation from the approved program, illegal activities, or upon the request of the meeting participants.

Often, closed mosques were used as court chambers. Muslim courts were not abolished until 1927, although their jurisdiction was gradually narrowed. In February 1924, they were barred from hearing criminal or important civil cases; two years later, they were prohibited from hearing divorce cases, and the people's Commissariat of justice declared them to be part of strictly voluntary judicial system. The eradication of Islamic courts did not mean the elimination of Islamic judges who proceeded from religious courts to the people's courts. Because judges were often unfamiliar with the adopted laws and statues, they made legal mistakes and applied the traditional Islamic Shariah laws. The liberation of women was one of the principle goals of antireligious campaigns aimed at eliminating traditional practices of veiling, polygamy, bride payments, and prearranged child marriages. In Central Asia, the emancipation of women contrasted with the norms of traditional society. Women were veiled and secluded from all aspects of social, political, and economic life and were treated as everything from humans to chattel, depending on how their families and villages and they themselves interpreted religious and social traditions.[219]

Although the Islamic reformist movement has promoted the adoption of European family structures since the early twentieth century, the veil was one of the most important symbols for Central Asian women. The position of

[219] Nancy Lubin, "Women in Soviet Central Asia: progress contradictions", *Soviet studies* 33, no.2 (April 1981), p.197.

women significantly improved during the Soviet rule. At the end of the Soviet era, 99 % of women in the region were literate, and women accounted for almost half of all students in higher and secondary professional educational establishments. Women made up approximately 45 % of all government and party officials. However, this static did not reflect the fact that most of the native women were employed in predominantly unskilled positions. The disparity between men and women was great in the field of science. Over one-third of the researchers were women, but women formed only one-tenth of the professors, Ph.D holders and high-ranking academicians.[220] However, these figures do not imply discrimination. For many women, low skilled jobs were a matter of preference because such positions provided the opportunities to have a shortened working day and to work near their houses in order to have ample time for domestic chores. Paradoxically, despite all the policies implemented, women in Central Asia remained the most conservative, religious, and tradition-bound component of the society.[32]

As child marriages or the practice of older men marrying pubescent or prepubescent girls (often as second or third wives) was an important local tradition, the Bolsheviks strongly enforced child protection laws and imposed severe punishments on violations. As compensation for the restrictions on women, it became acceptable in Central Asia for the adolescent boys to take on the role of public sexual objects for men. These boys would dance suggestively in public gathering places and were sometimes acquired by wealthy patrons for sexual services. After the total Sovietization of Central Asia, this practice was criminalized and eventually banned. In 1927, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan started to regulate private sexual behavior in compliance with the new Russian Family and Marriage Code. Such activities as sexual relations with a minor, compulsion of a person to enter sexual relations, and even bride payments were criminalized. Because of the deep roots of local customs, polygamy was not

[220] Paula Michaels, "Medical Propaganda and Cultural Revolution in Soviet Kazakhstan, 1928-1941", *Russian Review* 55, no.2 (April 2000), p.162.

considered a crime in Uzbekistan until 1931, although it was outlawed by the Russian Criminal Code in 1928, which was applicable in Uzbekistan.

The fight against Islam in Central Asia coincided with a cultural revolution aimed at freeing people from superstition and making them believe in the power of science and ability of the Soviet state and Communist Party to lead the citizenry toward higher stages of economic and cultural development. For this purpose, pilots took peasants on airplane rides to prove that there was no God in the sky, while doctors used modern pharmaceuticals to demonstrate that germs caused diseases. The provision of biomedical services was one of the principal elements of Stalin's cultural policy, because it kept industrial workers healthy.[221] Between 1927 and 1937, in Kazakhstan, the number of physicians grew from 452 or 1,571, and the number of hospital beds increased from 3,767 to 16,290.[222] The effectiveness of government efforts to undermine Islam was minimal. Forced mosque closing created outrage, the unveiling campaign injured or killed more women than it helped, and sending activists to the mosques on Muslim holidays occasionally resulted in murders followed by the state reprisals. A secular society in Central Asia was created by modern development, industrial building, and the opening of universities and other educational institutions, which opened new opportunities for local people. Those who wanted to succeed had to play according to the rules of the twentieth-century industrial and widely non-religious society. Non-religious and bilingual urban elites were created in all five Soviet Central Asian republics. In the rural areas, which were much less affected by economic and social development, the enforcement of soviet values was weaker and Islamic traditions were stronger. All over the region, Islam provided the population with the organizational, ideological, and institutional help to preserve the national culture, identity and traditional way of life. The Central Asian party

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221 Religion index one: Periodicals, Volume 36, American Theological Library Association., 2005, Indiana University.

222 Patrick Bascio and Evgueny Navikov, *Gorbachev and the Collapse of the Soviet Communist Party: The Historical and Theoretical Background* (New-York: Peter Lang, 1994), p.83.

members who worked against Islamic institutions were probably motivated more by power politics than communist ideology and remembered Islamic traditions learnt in their childhood. The next generations of officials did not have personal negative associations with the clergy but dependent on the communist system, the expressed at least superficial support to anti Islamic campaigns. Behavior of those officials was dualistic, and those who closed down a mosque one day might hire a mullah to perform the funeral of a relative the next.

Stalin was afraid that national traditions hid opposition to the Soviet Union, and he accused native leaders who preserved national traditions of opposing Communist policies, which was a crime punishable by death. Despite the fact that almost all former Central Asian nationalists switched to the soviet regime, almost all of them were accused of anti-Soviet activities and executed, while their family members were sent to prison camps in Siberia. Approximately 110,000 people were murdered in Central Asia between 1929 and 1953. In Kazakhstan, 17% of all party members were purged and eventually sentenced to imprisonment. In Uzbekistan, during the period of 1937 to 1953, almost 100,000 people were tried, and 13,000 of them were executed. Arrests affected all levels of the society, especially the nation's clerisy and people who received their education abroad or who participated in revolutionary movements outside of the Bolshevik Party. In February 1956, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, who was trying to distance himself from the mass terror of the Stalin era, accused Stalin of political crimes and initiated the rehabilitation of individuals illegally, prosecuted during Stalin's show trials. In Uzbekistan, in October 1956, the first secretary of the Communist Party, Nuriddin Muhitdinov, took the first step toward the rehabilitation of the purged Uzbek intellectual elites and announced the rehabilitation of some Uzbek writers. Muhitdinov stated that only certain Uzbek writers and Poets, such as Abdulla Quirky, who had few ideological "mistakes and shortcoming" should be rehabilitated by the republication of what he called their "most valuable works". He thus excluded

those Uzbek writers and poets who had "hostile intentions" and had been against the Soviet government during the early Soviet period.[223] since Muhitdinov failed to mention any other Jadid writers by name besides Qodiriy; local neo-Stalinists ignored this proposal of rehabilitation. The full rehabilitation started only in the late 1980's, when Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev announced his policy of *glasnost.* On March 14, 1969, Sharaf Rasihdov was elected the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Uzbekistan Communist Party, the highest post in the republic and one he held until his death in 1983. Later he turned his appointment into an unrestricted personal rule synonymous to lawlessness and exploitation of the people. Rashidov in Uzbekistan and his Kazakh counterpart, Dinmukhamed Kunaev who was at the top of Kazakh authorities since 1942 until his dismissal in 1986 proved that the extreme centralization and uniformity of the Soviet system was largely a myth in regard to the implementation of policies in some Central Asian republics and in the areas where the center chose not to exert its power. Reports of confusion and non-implementation of federal legislation in these republics often appeared in mass media. Communist bosses in their practical activities used traditional methods of feudal and tribal relationships. While these traditional relations were blessed by Islamic doctrine, the most outrageous forms of corruption, lawlessness, and oppression in Central Asia were carried out by local authorities disguised as Islamic traditionalists. Adylov, one of the leading figures in the cotton scandal, explained his cruelty by saying that he was a descendant of Timurlane. As Islam was not destroyed by repressions, Rashido Kunaev and other local leaders assured federal authorities that Central Asian Islam presented no danger to Bolshevik rule. In reality, local elites were actively involved in destroying Islam, seeing its representatives as potential contenders to local political power. The local party elite replaced the regular clergy with local clergy who were willing to follow the directives of local party committees and the secret police. Although most of

[223] Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p.273.

the population avoided any alliance with the discredited clergy, these people were viewed with some respect by the people of the Central Asia because they knew Arabic, could read the Quran, and pilgrimaged. While traveling throughout the Muslim community abroad, they promoted a positive image of the Soviet Union. The parallel existence of official and underground Islam in Central Asia continued to the end of the 1980's. In March 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became the secretary general of the communist part of the Soviet Union (CPSU) central committee, immediately initiating the unprecedented program of reforms that became known as *perestroika* (rebuilding) and *glasnost* (openness). The goals of the reforms were to speed up the country's development and convert the ideas of socialism with basic principles of the market economy and social democracy. Without any real competition and a democratic political system, all changes remained illusionary, and the reforms did not bring the expected results. Because of the campaign against heavy drinking and the ongoing economic crisis, the federal budget shrunk and the GDP of the Central Asian countries decreased in 1989 by 1-1.5 % compared to 1985. The freedom of mass media provoked public discussions about the future of the socialist society, ideological pluralism, and the national rebirth of the union republics. In Central Asia, local elites no longer feared Moscow's comrades and came forth to defend their national heritage and remind Russia of its colonial conquest and domination. When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power, the government's anti-Islamic policy intensified. In November 1986, Gorbechev met with the members of the Central Committee of the Uzbek communist party, and according to witnesses' accounts, he expressed so much hostility towards Islam in his instructions to local communists that his speech was not reported in Soviet news papers.[224] later, Gorbachev's reforms brought the first relaxation to religious lives of Soviet Muslims; the restoration of mosques was allowed, and the first political rise of Islamic self-consciousness was tolerated. In the late 1980's the ideas of sovereign state development became especially popular among national elites and intellectuals. In 1989 and

[224] James Jackson, "What Really Happened in Alma-Ata", *Time,* March 2, 1986, p.17.

1990, all five republics adopted laws regulating the status of the national languages, which were recognized as official state languages. The study of native languages was initiated and, together with the publications of previously prohibited books of the national authors, it became a factor in the growing national self-consciousness. Informal social, political, and religious organizations were established. At first national, these nongovernmental organizations focused on studying national traditions, culture, history, and environmental concerns, but many of them had openly nationalist agendas. Later, these groups were transformed into political parties, which continue to roles in political processes today.

Islam in the Soviet Era

Islam was severely persecuted and its infrastructure almost totally destroyed. During the Second World War, a small, state-controlled, Muslim hierarchy was re-established and some of the formal elements of religious observance were permitted to reappear. Yet there was no abatement of the campaign to secularize society and to replace religious belief by 'scientific atheism'. The result was that by the 1980s Islam had become more a marker of cultural and ethnic identity than an active spiritual commitment for most Central Asians. The chief manifestations of allegiance to the faith at this period were the celebration of religious ceremonies connected with rites of passage, such as (male) circumcision, marriage and burial.[225] In addition, there was widespread observance of folk traditions, such as pilgrimages to the graves of holy men and the performance of associated rituals to secure divine assistance and protection. In popular understanding, such practices were considered to be in keeping with Muslim belief, but in fact were syncretic accretions. Knowledge of Islamic doctrine, of prayers, and even of the basic Muslim profession of faith ('There is no God but Allah and Muhammad (s.a.w) is His Prophet') was

[225] Ro'i, 2000, *Islam in the Soviet Union*, London: Hurt.

limited to a small number of predominantly elderly individuals.[226] In the Soviet era, all religious beliefs were attacked by the communist authorities as superstition and "vestiges of the past." Most religious schooling and religious observance were banned, and the vast majority of mosques were closed. An official Muslim Board of Central Asia with headquarters in Tashkent was established during World War II to supervise Islam in Central Asia. For the most part, the Muslim Board functioned as an instrument of propaganda whose activities did little to enhance the Muslim cause. Atheist indoctrination stifled religious development and contributed to the isolation of the Turkmen from the international Muslim community. Some religious customs, such as Muslim burial and male circumcision, continued to be practiced throughout the Soviet period, but most religious belief, knowledge, and customs were preserved only in rural areas in "folk form" as a kind of unofficial Islam not sanctioned by the state-run Spiritual Directorate. It is estimated that in the late 1980s, Islam had the second largest number of believers in the Soviet Union, among them 45 and 50 million people identifying themselves as Muslims. However, the Soviet Union had only about 500 working Islamic mosques, a fraction of the mosques in prerevolutionary Russia, and Soviet law forbade Islamic religious activity outside working mosques and Islamic schools. All working mosques, religious schools, and Islamic publications were supervised by four "spiritual directorates" established by Soviet authorities to provide governmental control. The Spiritual Directorate for Central Asia and Kazakhstan, the Spiritual Directorate for the European Soviet Union and Siberia, and the Spiritual Directorate for the Northern Caucasus and Dagestan oversaw the religious life of Sunni Muslims. The Spiritual Directorate for Transcaucasia dealt with both Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims. The overwhelming majority of the Muslims were Sunnis.[227] Soviet Muslims also differed linguistically and culturally from each other. Among them, they spoke about fifteen Turkic languages, ten

[226] Curtis, Glenn E, (1996), *Turkmenistan: A Country Study*. Library of Congress Country Studies. Washington: United States Government Printing Office. OCLC 45380435. http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/tmtoc.html

[227] http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-12520.html

Iranian languages, and thirty Caucasian languages. Hence, communication between different Muslim groups had been difficult. Although in 1989 Russian often served as a lingua franca among some educated Muslims, the number of Muslims fluent in Russian was low. Culturally, some Muslim groups had highly developed urban traditions, whereas others were recently nomadic. Some lived in industrialized environments; others resided in isolated mountainous regions. In sum, Muslims were not a homogeneous group with a common national identity and heritage, although they shared the same religion and the same country. Unofficial Muslim congregations, meeting in teahouses and private homes with their own mullahs,[228] greatly outnumbered those in the officially sanctioned mosques. The mullahs in unofficial Islam were either self-taught or were informally trained by other mullahs. In the late 1980s, unofficial Islam appeared to split into fundamentalist congregations and groups that emphasized Sufism[229]. However, the government only approved official Islam through Spiritual Directorate, as it is the puppet in the hands of government.[230]

Official Islam

"Official Islam" meant the Muslim Spiritual Directorates and the legally sanctioned body of ulma. It was observed in 1950s, when the administrative structure of Soviet Islam was sketched out. During the 1970s and 1980s, greater attention was paid to the functioning of the Directorates in the USSR as a whole and in the Muslim regions. The Spiritual Directorates established during the Second World War were unique in the Muslim world.[231] In many respects, however, the Muslim administration resembled such a body, with a ranked hierarchy, a recognized and a regulated body of servants of the cult and designated places of worship, a situation that 'has no parallel in the rest of the

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228 Mullah (ملا) is generally used to refer to a Muslim man, educated in Islamic theology and sacred law. The title, given to some Islamic clergy, is derived from the Arabic word مَوْلَى *mawla* , meaning "vicar", "master" and "guardian". In large parts of the Muslim world, particularly Iran, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Turkey, Central Asia, Somalia and South Asia, it is the name commonly given to local Islamic clerics or mosque leaders.

229 Sufism or tasawwuf (Arabic: تصوّف) is defined by its adherents as the inner, mystical dimension of Islam. A practitioner of this tradition is generally known as a Sufi (صُوفِيّ). Another name for a Sufi is Dervish.

230 Bennigsen and Wimbush, (1985b), *Muslims of the Soviet Empire*, London: Hurst, p.16.

231 Bennigsen, (1977), 'Modernisation and conservatism in Soviet Islam', in Dunn, D. (ed.) *Religion and Modernisation in the Soviet Union*, Boulder, CO: Westview, p.253.

Muslim world'.[232] While alien to the Muslim tradition the new organizational structure imposed upon Soviet Islam a structure which was obviously devised for much more institutionalized, 'churchly' religions, like Orthodoxy, and was clearly designed to facilitate central state control over Muslim religious activities, by having them centralized and entrusted to the hierarchically organized, professional 'clergy.'[233] This situation arose as a result of the unique conditions prevailing in the USSR: The Soviet state, due to its ideology, does not recognize the existence of individual believers. It allows a religious life to these believers, and for this reason institutions, the Muftiates [exist].[234] As the permitted channel for the expression of Islam, the Directorates regulated the affairs of believers and represented their interests to the government through the council of Religious Affairs, a body within the USSR council of Ministers which had branches within each republic. 'These Directorates not only provide a channel for discussions with the Soviet government but, more importantly, they are the instrument for organizing the religious life of the believers.'[235] The Directorate performs only a few of the traditional functions of the Muslim clergy,[236] as there were no waqf lands or sharia courts to administer. The four spiritual directorates are empowered by the soviet government to control the religious life of all Muslim believers. All the 'working' mosques, madrasas, and religious publications are placed under their strict supervision. Under Soviet legislation, any kind of religious activity outside the working mosques is illegal and strictly forbidden. All Muslim clerics must be registered with the directorates as well as with the council for Religious Affairs of the Republic and are paid and nominated by them. The directorates and their registered clerics alone are entitled to represent Islam vis-a-vis the Soviet authorities.[237] The Directorate was represented in each republic by a single Qazi or a Qaziyat

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232 Bennigsen and Wimbush, (1985b), op. cit., p.14.
233 Bociurkiw, B. (1980), 'The changing Soviet image of Islam: The domestic scene', *Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 2, II: 9-25, p.16.
234 Bociurkiw, B. (1980), 'The changing Soviet image of Islam: The domestic scene', *Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 2, II: 9-25, p.16.
235 Carrere d' Encausse, (1974), 'Islam in the Soviet Union: Attempts at modernisation', *Religion in Communist Lands*, 2, IV/V: 12-20, p.13.
236 Rakowska-Harmstone, (1983), 'Islam and Nationalism: Central Asia and Kazakhstan under Russian Rule', Central Asian Survey, 2, II: 7-87, p.42.
237 Bennigsen and Wimbush, (1985b), op. cit., p.16.

(delegation). Senior staff were formally elected by the ulma and confirmed in their posts by the Council of Religious Affairs. Below the Directorate, Islam at mosque level was organized differently, and to read from the available Western sources, confusingly. The basic principle was local democracy. According to Bennigsen, 'A Muslim parish (mutwali), compared to its pre-revolutionary predecessor is a curiously democratic body.'[238] Mosques were registered on the request of at least twenty believers. The mosque was administered by a group called the mutawalliyat or 'a committee of parishioners which deals not only with the financial and administrative business of the parish, but also, with the purely intellectual and spiritual problems which might arise.'[239] The mutawalliyat is responsible for the maintenance of the mosque and is empowered to represent the community of believers in matters involving dealings with state organizations or other group of Muslims.[240] They also had authority to employ the Imam or to expel him, who was responsible to it, in finding his teaching uncongenial.[241] The Imam, or Imam-Khatib as he was known, was 'no more than a technician, a paid employee'.[242] This seemingly democratic system had its limits, because only an aalim accredited by the Spiritual Directrorate and the Council of Religious Affairs was legally entitled to seek the post of Imam-Khatib. Candidates had to conform to the demands of the Directorate. Thus, the Soviet political principle of 'democratic centralism' was preserved in the realm. Although formally democratic, Islam faced the same restrictions as other spheres of Soviet society. Moreover, the Directorate comprised a Council of ulma that issued *fatwas* on matters of importance to Soviet Muslim, and an International Department responsible for organizing Hajj. They also provided religious training for all Soviet ulma irrespective of rite. Bennigsen stated that 'the so-called four spiritual directions are not spiritual but purely administrative institution.'[243] The Directorates represented the only institution available to Muslims, beyond the federal government and

[238] Bennigsen, (1977), op. cit., p.254.
[239] Ibid., p.254.
[240] Akiner, (1983), Islamic Peoples of Soviet Union, London: Kegan Paul p.36.
[241] Bennigsen, (1977), op. cit., p.255.
[242] Ibid., p.254
[243] Ibid., p.253.

the party, which transcended republican and ethnic boundaries. The ulma were, therefore, instrumental in preserving Soviet Muslims identity. They were made it possible to lessen the points of the conflicts between Islam and State's demands by reinterpreting some of the ritual demands of the religion. For instance, in place of prayer five times daily, once was acceptable. Various people were exempted from *Ramadan* fast, and those who were to observe it were not required to do so for the entire month. Reinterpreting doctrine made the anti-Islamic drive weaker, since this had been directed against many of the traditional aspects of the religion that were being played down, or rejected, by the ulma: Such statements as the one issued by Velizade Sharif, the Mufti of Transcaucasia: 'It is high time for us to understand that many things in the shariat have become obsolete and even rebuke believers', were politically irreproachable-and helped people stick to Islam.[244]

The ulma ensured that Islam was able to survive. There was, however, a price to pay in terms of co-operation with the government: The Muslim Spiritual Directorate of Central Asia and Kazakhstan in Tashkent is thus the party's instrument for control of religious life in the republic. It is known that the Directorate is closely supervised by the KGB through the council for Religious Affairs (staffed largely by retired KGB officers). It is not surprising therefore that the official clergy are politically loyal and faithfully support Soviet official policies, the price that had to be paid for their very existence. The official Muslim hierarchy is perfectly loyal and obedient to the Soviet regime. It is certainly the most obedient of all ecclesiastical administrations in the USSR.[245] Ulma loyalty, although recognized as essential to the preservation of the institution of Islam and regarded as, in the main, more beneficial to the government than to the Muslims, had its advantages. State control over the ulma, the dilution of the teachings of Islam to avoid conflict with the state, and

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[244] Imart, G. (1986), 'Kirghizia between Islam and nationalism' *Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs,*7, II: 343-72, p.354.
[245] Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay,C. (1978), 'Muslim religious conservatism and dissent', *Religion in Communist Lands*, 7, III: 153-61, p.154.

unswerving support for the state‘s action made it possible to present the ulma as puppets of the state and not representative of the wider Islamic community: ‘well-educated, sincere Muslims who nevertheless are not spokesman for the real Islam.’[246] More serious than the ulma’s role as a spokesmen for official policy was their small number. Although the number of mosques was not an accurate way of determining the strength of Islam because Islam could only legally be practiced in mosques, but since mosques were the ‘workplace’ of ulma, such a count, in the Soviet context, could serve as a measure of the ulma‘s strength. There are probably less than 1,000 “registered clerics” who are paid and controlled by muftiats-too few to satisfy the religious needs of the population.[247] It is obvious that official Islam alone could not maintain religious feeling among masses of believers. There are too few mosques left, and too few ‘registered’ clerics to satisfy the spiritual needs of the believers and to perform the necessary rites.[248] However, Islam is a non-sacerdotal religion. The shortage of ulma did not make it impossible to practice the faith. The void was filled by practitioners of ‘unofficial’, ‘out of mosque’ or ‘parallel Islam: It should be noted that the four spiritual Muslim administrations in the USSR are actually legal in character and can be by-passed by the devout Muslim. The ‘official Islam’, which these administrations claim to represent thus, fails to satisfy the important proportion of the Muslim that still, adhere to Islam. It should not be surprising that a ‘non-official Islam’ has arisen to challenge the ‘official hierarchy.[249] As the official clerics placed under the control of the Four Spiritual Directions, do not suffice for the religious needs of the Muslim population, are supplemented by unofficial mullahs, who escape all control of the official hierarchy.[250] ‘Parallel’, or ‘unofficial’, Islam was seen as more vibrant, more widespread, more ‘authentic’ and more of a challenge to the Soviet authorities than ‘official Islam’ could ever be.

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[246] Karpat, K. (1983), ‘Moscow and the Muslium question’ *Problems of Communism,*32, VI: 71-9, p.74.
[247] Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay,C. (1978), op. cit., p.154.
[248] Bennigsen and Wimbush, (1985b), op. cit., p.20.
[249] Bennigsen and Wimbush, S. (1975), ‘Muslim religious dissent in the USSR’, in DeGeorge, R. and Scanlan, J. (eds.), *Marxism and Religion in Eastern Europe*, Boston: Reidel, p.139.
[250] Bennigsen, (1977), op. cit., p.255.

Unofficial Islam/Parallel Islam

The term 'parallel Islam'/'Unofficial Islam' designates those activities of Soviet Muslims that take place outside of the control of the four Spiritual Directorates. Most of the activities that are considered Islam seem to be just basic Islamic ceremonies such as prayers, fast, hajj, etc.[251] Since Islam has no priesthood. Anyone can perform its rites, but 'unofficial Islam' was conceived as having a distinct organization that made it possible to talk of a religious moment in parallel to the ulma. It appeared as a surrogate of official Islam, almost the universal character of religious rites and customs in the family social life of Central Asian Muslims requires the daily presence of clergyman, which cannot be provided by the pitifully few registered 'servants of cult'. The need for a vast network of 'unofficial Islam' clergy is therefore manifest and its existence, albeit illegal, is acknowledged in Soviet sources.[252] It is supported in all regions of the Soviet Muslim world by the constant activity of 'unregistered clerics.[253] Almost anyone with some knowledge of Islamic tradition can conduct the prescribed rituals (birth, burial, circumcision, and so on). Parallel Islam, which is condemned by the official Soviet authorities and by the official Soviet Muslim, provides these services to the millions of practicing and non-practicing Muslims in the USSR who find it impossible to have their spiritual and cultural requirements satisfied at one of the officially sanctioned mosques or by clerics licensed by the Soviet state. For millions, a parallel network of itinerant clerics replaces these servants of the state-approved Muslim organization. And the Sheikh of the organizations were known as Ishans who concentrated on folk beliefs family rites.[254] While the performance of ceremonies not organized by the Directorate was illegal, it followed that parallel Islam was a clandestine phenomenon: 'Parallel Islam is, essentially, underground Islam.'[255] 'It has its own clandestine organization.'[256] These

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[251] Kocaoglu, (1983), *Nationality identity in Soviet Central Asian literature: Kazakh and Uzbek prose fiction of the post-Stalin period,* Columbia University, p.147.
[252] Rakowska-Harmstone, (1983), op. cit., p.53.
[253] Bennigsen and Wimbush, (1985a), op. cit., pp.85-6.
[254] Wimbush (1986), Muslims of the Soviet Empire. A Guide*, London & Bloomington, Ind., 1986,* p.223.
[255] Ibid., p.223.
[256] Bennigsen and Wimbush, (1975), op. cit., p.139.

organizations were associated with Sufis therefore, "non-official" Islam is based on the Sufi brotherhoods.[257] The dynamic "Parallel" or non-official Islam is more powerful than official Islam.[258] This represented a new development, which at its most basic meant such activity as private prayer at home, and 'Sufism' was often used interchangeably.[259] Alternatively, 'Soviet Islam has been split into an official religion, represented by sanctioned and co-operative administrations, and an unofficial one grouped around the *Tariqats*'.[260] Sufi groups, described as 'underground',[261] were seen as being secret or semi-secret mass organisation.[262] 'The Sufi orders are not small "chapels" but mass organizations (despite their clandestine character).[263] Group secrecy, which prevented infiltration by the KGB, was maintained by several means. One was limiting membership to specific cleans, resulting in a position in which 'adepts are subject to the loyalties of brotherhood and clan'.[264] The same solidarity could be achieved through craft guilds like those mentioned by Snesarev. 'Sufi orders control the surviving Muslim guilds and new guilds organized along traditional lines. Religious community rituals connected with traditional crafts also apparently survive'.[265] Sufi organizations usually consist of bodies of disciples grouped around a teacher, whose prescriptions regarding spiritual or physical exercises are followed strictly. In Rakows-Harmstone's words, 'Each *ishan* (or Sheikh) formed the nucleus of a group of followers known as *murids*, bound to the master by intricate rites, blind obedience and a dance like ritual known as *zikr*.[266] The discipline imposed by the teacher-pupil relationship was among the Sufis' greatest asset: Sufi *Tariqas* are tightly knit religious organizations with a strong leadership and a disciplined apparatus they are well-suited to clandestine activity have survived all attempts by the Soviet

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257 Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay,C. (1978), op. cit., p.155.
258 Bennigsen and Wimbush, (1985b), op. cit., p.21.
259 Broxup, M. (1983), 'Recent developments in Soviet Islam', *Religion in Communist Lands*, 11, I: 31-6, p.35.
260 Rywkin, M. op. cit., p.88.
261 Wimbush (1986), op.cit., p.228; Rakowska-Harmstone, (1983), op. cit., p.55; Bociurkiw, (1980), op. cit., p.19.
262 Bennigsen, (1981), 'Official Islam and Sufi brotherhood in the Soviet Union today'in Cudsi, H. and Dessouki, A, (eds), Islam and Power, London: Croom Helm, p.100.
263 Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay,C. (1978), op. cit., p.156.
264 Ibid., p.157.
265 Rakowska-Harmstone, (1983), op. cit., p.53.
266 Ibid., p.54.

regime to infiltrate them, to win them over or to destroy them.[267] The *Tariqa* represent perfectly structured hierarchical organizations, endowed an iron discipline which is certainly stronger than that of the Communist Party.[268] Sufi groups in certain ways resembled the 'cells' of the Communist Party, like their aptitude for clandestine activity, discipline, team spirit, and capacity to organize a parallel clergy, are rendered them 'dangerous'. Since their tight-knit groups meant that they were 'easily transformed into commandos'.[269] Sufis were held responsible for maintaining a network of unregistered institutions, notably thousands of underground mosques and madrasas.[270] The existence of unofficial mullahs also means the existence of unofficial mosques, and it is well documented that many such mosques exist, particularly in rural areas.[271] These include redundant mosques illegally reopened; 'prayer houses' usually in a cemetery or near a shrine; 'private' clandestine prayer- houses' open to all believers, which are located in the homes of Sufi Sheikhs'; and secret meeting places used only by Sufi adepts.[272] As well as performing religious rites, Sufis propagated Islam by means of two main media. The first was the underground school in which Arabic was taught. This was essential for the maintenance of the cult, since Arabic could otherwise be studied only in university and religious instruction only obtained at the two colleges in Bokhara and Tashkent, which had a low intake capacity and a high entry requirement. Since religious instruction is forbidden in Soviet school, parallel Islam has quite naturally come to assume an educational as well as a religious role. Sufis are identified openly as being responsible for the establishment of religious and Quranic schools.[273] Another medium for propagation of Islam was the custom of pilgrimage. Soviet government sent only 18 to 20 people out of 50 million Soviet Muslims annually to Mecca,[274] because Pilgrimage to a holy place

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267 Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay,C. (1978), op. cit., p.159.
268 Bennigsen and Wimbush, (1985b), op. cit., p.21.
269 Roy, O. (1983), 'Sufism in the Afghan Resistance' *Central Asian Survey*, 2, IV: 61-80, p.69.
270 Bennigsen, (1986), 'Les tariqat en Asie Centrale', in Popovic, A. and Weinstein, G. (eds), *Les Orders mystiques dans l'Islam*, Paris: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, p.227.
271 Rakowska-Harmstone, (1983), op. cit., p.54.
272 Bennigsen and Wimbush, (1985a), op. cit., pp.86-7.
273 Ibid., p.87-8.
274 Kocaoglu, (1983), op. cit., p.149.

within Central Asia was an alternative to Hajj. A number of holy places existed, usually associated with the tombs of saints, clan ancestors, biblical figures, or mythical and pre-Islamic figures. Sufi activity was supposed to be centered on these sites. *Mazars* usually have a guardian in most cases an unofficial mullah or *ishan*, an influential member of a local community who dispenses religious "propaganda".[275] Sufi in the Soviet Union control and maintain holy places. The location of holy places in the territory of the Muslim republics represents a kind of religious geography of nationalism that can be charted according to the location of Sufi brotherhoods. Today more than ever, Muslim holy places controlled by Sufi brotherhoods are the spiritual centers of Islam.[276] The cult of saints and its associated custom of pilgrimage was 'probably the most important element of popular Islam/folk Islam in Central Asia'[277] Because of this it provided the principle location for the dissemination of religious teaching by Sufis. Holy places were 'an excellent forum for the brotherhoods to influence the Muslim masses.[278] It is because of this strategic position, Sufis have unique and unlimited access to non-adepts who observe the cult of saints. They stand therefore at the critical juncture where popular belief meets clandestine organization, where ordinary Muslims come across with the highly motivated and rigidly disciplined Sufis. Soviet sources agree that during a pilgrimage, the holy place is the main contact place between the 'Sufi fanatics' and the population- believers and unbelievers alike.[279] Because of this direct contact with the Muslim masses, whatever the content of their teaching, continued to be felt by the people as closer to their worries and needs than the ulema.[280] Sufis had deep roots in the community and they enjoy solid support from the Muslim masses.[281] It is clear in areas where *Tariqats* exist, they hold the actual authority over the social group and exercise a deep influence on

[275] Rakowska-Harmstone, (1983), op. cit., p.53.
[276] Bennigsen and Wimbush, (1985a), op. cit., pp.94 and 96-7.
[277] Ibid., p. 94.
[278] Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay, C. (1978), op. cit., p.157.
[279] Bennigsen and Wimbush, (1985a), op. cit., pp.94-5.
[280] Imart, G. (1986), op. cit., p.364.
[281] Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay, C. (1978), op. cit., p.159.

public opinion.[282] Their teachings were of great importance. Although religious observance did not necessarily imply opposition to the Soviet regime, but co-operation with the state involved making a number of religious compromises. The Sufis were thought unwilling to do: 'the goal of the secret organizations is to maintain the true faith.'[283] 'They are struggling to build a world which is sanctified by faith, in which Islam penetrates every aspect of public and private life.[284] This brought Sufis into direct conflict with the state. The Tariqats are in fact *mass organizations* utterly estranged from the ideology of the Soviet system.[285] The Sufi brotherhoods appear to have no other 'ideology' apart from a very conservative form of Islam; and their goals are those of the traditional *jihad*, or Holy War', which fights sin, the infidel rulers and the 'bad Muslims' who serve them.[286] Their ideology, a legacy of Shamil's *jihad*, is a vague but powerful appeal to build a world entirely sanctified by faith, which implies, of course, the expulsion of the Russian infidels.[287] Sufism was presented as inherently anti-Russian, a situation which some saw as a natural feature of this branch of Islam. Sufism has always played a big role in anti-colonialist movements'[288] many shrines were the tombs of leaders of nineteenth-century resistance to the Russians. Whereas previously the anti-Russian revolts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as the Basmachi movement, were depicted as being of nationalist inspiration, these were now interpreted as religious revolts: All movements of armed resistance to the Russian conquerors from the late eighteen century to the last Chechen uprising in 1942-43 have been led or supported by Sufi brotherhoods:[289] These movements had been inspired, by the Naqshbandiyya, an order that remained strong in the region and 'which from the eighteenth century has represented the

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[282] Ibid., p.158.
[283] Wimbush (1986), op. cit., p.228.
[284] Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay, C. (1978), op. cit., p.158.
[285] Carrere d' Encausse, (1978), op. cit., p.327.
[286] Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay, C. (1978), op. cit., p.158.
[287] Bowers , S. (1980), 'Islam and Soviet Policy: The international dimension', *Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 2, II: 26=36, p.35.
[288] Roy, O. (1983), op. cit,. p.59.
[289] Bennigsen and Wimbush, (1985a), op. cit., p.106.

hard core of Muslim resistance to Russian conquest'.[290] Other groups, notably the Hairy Ishans, had developed, which also evinced an antipathy to the Soviets.[291] The Sufis alone can offer clandestine organizations, whose followers are characterized by their zealous commitment to Islam and their rigid discipline, to the Soviet Islamic dissident. In times of crises, the brotherhoods have been the catalysts for potent anti-Russian and anti-Soviet movements, and they could become so again.[292] Sufism preserved Central Asian distinctiveness by encouraging and facilitating behavior patterns linked to Islam, and was itself an integral part of Central Asian culture.

Soviet Religious Policy

Soviet policy towards religion was based on the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, which made atheism the official doctrine of the Communist Party. However, "the Soviet law and administrative practice through most of the 1920's extended some tolerance to religion and forbade the arbitrary closing or destruction of some functioning churches",[293] while each successive Soviet constitution granted freedom of belief. As the founder of the Soviet state, Lenin put it:

Religion is the opium of the people: this saying of Marx is the cornerstone of the entire ideology of Marxism about religion. All modern religions and churches, all and of every kind of religious organizations are always considered by Marxism as the organs of bourgeois reaction, used for the protection of the exploitation and the stupefaction of the working class.[294]

Marxism-Leninism has advocated for the suppression, and, ultimately, the disappearance of religious beliefs, considering them "unscientific" and

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290 Bennigsen and Wimbush, (1975), op cit., p.140.
291 Kocaoglu, (1980), 'Islam in the Soviet Union: atheistic propaganda and "unofficial" religious activities', *Journal of the Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Volume 5, Issue 1, p.151.
292 Wimbush (1985a), op. cit., p.161.
293 Fitzpatrick, S. 1999, *Everyday Stalinism*. Oxford University Press, New York, p.27.
294 Lenin, V. I. "About the attitude of the working party toward the religion". Collected works, v. 17, p.41. http://www.psylib.ukrweb.net/books/maenl01/txt17. Retrieved August 8, 2010.

"superstitious". In the 1920s and 1930s, such organizations as the League of the Militant Godless were active in anti-religious propaganda. Atheism was the norm in schools, communist organizations (such as the Young Pioneer Organization), and the media.

The regime's efforts to eradicate religion in the Soviet Union, however, varied over the years with respect to particular religions and have been affected by higher state interests. Official policies and practices not only varied with time but also differed in their application from one nationality to another and from one religion to another. In 1929, with the onset of the Cultural Revolution in Soviet Union and an upsurge of radical militancy in the Party and Komsomol, a powerful "hard line" in favour of mass closing of churches and arrests of priests became dominant and evidently won Stalin's approval. Secret "hard line" instructions were issued to local party organizations, but not published.[295] When the anti-religious drive inflamed the anger of the rural population, not to mention that of the Pope and other Western church spokesmen, the regime was able to back off from a policy that it had never publicly endorsed anyway.[296] Although all Soviet leaders had the same long-range goal of developing a cohesive Soviet people, they pursued different policies to achieve it. For the Soviet regime, the questions of nationality and religion were always closely linked. Not surprisingly, therefore, the attitude toward religion also varied from a total ban on some religions to official support of others.

Soviet anti-religious legislation

The Soviet Union had the elimination of religion and its replacement with state atheism[297] as a fundamental ideological goal of the state.[298] While religion was never officially made illegal, the state yet made great efforts towards the goal of eliminating religion. To this end throughout its history is engaged in anti-

[295] "Moscow Keeps Easter; No Riots Expected; A Faithful Few Still Go to Church and Are Unmolested", *The New York Times*. April 6, 1923. P.4. Retrieved Oct. 14, 2010.
[296] Fitzpatrick, S. 1994, *On the drive against religion in 1929-30*. Stalin's Peasants, New York, pp.59-63.
[297] State atheism is the official "promotion of atheism" by a government, sometimes combined with active suppression of religious freedom and practice.
[298] Ramet, Sabrina Petra Ed. (1993). *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*. Cambridge University Press. P.4

religious persecutions of varying intensity and methodology. Believers were never officially attacked for being believers, but they were officially attacked for perceived or invented resistance to the state and its policies.[299] These attacks, however, in the broader ideological context were ultimately meant to serve the ultimate goal of eliminating religion and replacing it with atheism, and the perceived resistance acted as a legal pretext to carry this out. Through this method believers were effectively widely attacked for being believers and promoting religion, but officially they were only attacked for disobedience to the state.[300] As part of these persecutions, the state enacted a significant body of legislation that regulated and curtailed religious practices. This, along with much secret instructions that were not published, formed the official legal position of the Soviet state against religion. It was designed in order to hurt and hamper religious activities, and the state often vigilantly watched religious believers for their breaking of these laws to justify arresting them; volunteer neighbourhood committees called public commissions for control over observance on the laws about religious cults' watched their religious neighbours and reported violations of the law to the appropriate authorities.[301] The state sought to control religious bodies through such laws with the intention of making these bodies disappear.[302] These laws often carried many ambiguities that allowed the state to abuse them in order to persecute believers.

Soviet Policies towards Islam

Soviet policies towards Islam went through several phases. The main priority in the early period was to win the loyalty of the masses. This required a certain degree of accommodation towards the ulma, since no matter how corrupt individual clerics might have been; they were nevertheless important and respected members of the community. Soon, however, measures were

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[299] Anderson, John (1994) , *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.3.
[300] Pospielovsky, Dimitry V. (1987). *A History of Soviet Atheism in Theory, and Practice, and the Believer*. 1: "A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Anti-Religious Policies". New York: St. Martin's Press.
[301] USDS Bulletin, "Religion in Eastern Europe". *US Department of State Bulletin* (Washington: U.S. Department of State) (86). March 1986.
[302] Pospielovsky 1987, op. cit., p.132.

introduced that aimed at dismantling the social, legal and economic basis of Islamic institutions. These were systematically replaced by Soviet bodies. The Arabic script, which had been used in Central Asia since the introduction of Islam, was abolished in favour of the Latin script at the end of the 1920s (in turn to be replaced by the Cyrillic in 1940). The campaign for the emancipation of women was likewise used to undermine Islam by portraying the religion as a source of ignorance, oppression and social injustice. Atheistic propaganda was intensified and in the early 1930s, arbitrary arrests and executions were used to eliminate Muslim leaders who refused to co-operate with the authorities. All the madrasas were closed and religious literature confiscated. Zakat was banned,[303] the annual *hajj* was suspended and contacts with foreign Muslims virtually ceased. A hundred or so mosques remained open - out of the many thousands that had existed during the Tsarist period. During the Second World War, a more conciliatory attitude was adopted towards the Muslim community. The tiny body of ulma that had survived the purges of the 1930s was co-opted by the state authorities. In a personal capacity they may have been devout (some undoubtedly were), but in their formal capacity they were primarily Soviet officials. An administrative body, the Muslim Board for Central Asia and Kazakhstan (MBCAK) was established in Tashkent, under the chairmanship of a Mufti. In 1944, the *hajj* was officially reinstated, though only a very small, carefully vetted group of clerics was able to benefit from this. The following year, a single madrasa was reopened (the only official Muslim educational establishment in the entire Soviet Union). In 1971, a second madrasa was established. The number of functioning mosques gradually increased, and the public celebration of religious ceremonies became a little easier. In addition, a few religious publications began to appear, and promising madrasa students were sent to Islamic universities in Egypt and other Arab countries to complete their Quranic studies. The motivation for this change of policy was not so much a greater degree of tolerance towards Islam, but rather

[303] The fast, though not banned, was difficult to perform, forms of prayer were all but unknown, and the *shahada* (proclamation of faith) is expressed by the believer in the silence of his own heart and escapes the control of the authorities.

a desire to present the Soviet Union in a favourable light to the developing world, particularly the oil-rich Arab countries of the Middle East. This entailed creating at least a facade of acceptance of Soviet Islam.[304] The effects of secularization, however, were by now deeply entrenched and the great majority of the Central Asian Muslims were unable to recite even the basic attestation of faith ("*There is no God but Allah and prophet Muhammad s.a.w is His messenger*").

Islam under Communism

Islam was highly repressed under communism though it had the second largest number of believers in the Soviet Union, among them 45 and 50 million people identifying themselves as Muslims. However, the religious institutions of the organized Muslim community in the Soviet Union were subject to decades of anti-religious policies and restrictions imposed by the Soviet government on all religious activity. After the October 1917 revolution, the foundation for an anti-Islamic strategy was laid out as the Bolshevik government implemented a radical programme separating religion from the state, and launched violent campaigns against all religious institutions in general. The rationale behind this strategy was derived from the Marxist belief that religion was an obstacle to modernization and social development. The Muslims felt the blow of this policy when mosques, *Sharia* courts and religious schools were closed down, members of the clergy were persecuted, and religious endowment lands (*waqf*) were confiscated. One of the most serious consequences of this campaign was the Basmachi revolt that began in 1918. The revolt involved the *Mujahidin* Sufis who fought fiercely to resist the establishment of Soviet rule that would exclude the native Muslim population from power. By 1924, the revolt had weakened but continued in the Pamirs until 1928. Lenin's policies were reversed once again in 1924 when some prominent Muslim-turned Communists advised him to rethink his tactics. The anti-Islamic campaign was put on hold and an attempt was made to restore trust among the Muslims by returning *waqf*

[304] Roi, Y., *Islam in the Soviet Union: From World War II to Perestroika*, London: Hurst, 2000.

property, reopening mosques and Islamic schools, and resuming the practice of the *Sharia* law.[305] When a relative degree of support and trust was achieved, Lenin reverted to his long-term anti-Islamic strategy. Between 1925 and 1927, a number of decrees were issued to curb the influence of the *Sharia* courts by prohibiting the establishment of new courts and cutting off financial aid disbursed to them by the local government. Nationalization of parts of the *waqf* property was initiated in 1925, depriving religious and educational institutions of material support. Much of the Muslim religious officialdom was dispersed through relocation, exile, imprisonment and assassination. All Islamic schools were banned and the Latin script replaced teaching and publishing in Arabic.[306] The harsh treatment of Muslims continued into the 1930s when mosques continued to function and clerics continued to preach, but in vastly reduced numbers and under conditions of persistent persecution. Under Stalin, the elimination of the *outward* attributes of Islam was important, thus, three of the five pillars of Islam—the payment of the *zakat* (alms), the *hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca, and the observance of the fast of Ramadan were outlawed.[307] Soviet efforts to undermine all religions continued until World War II, when the repression of religion and the clergy almost ceased. During the war years, the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM) were created. With the Mufti at its head, it was charged with regulating the registration of mosques, appointing *imams* to lead local congregations and even dictating the content of sermons and the nature of 'proper' Islamic practice. The official Muslim was co-opted by and took its cues from the communist party leadership. The Muftiate was essentially designed as Oliver Roy puts it: 'to undermine and even attempt to destroy popular Islam, particularly the connections between national and religious identities, and to create a token, regulated, officially appointed clergy in order to manage the few remaining religious institutions , and after 1955, to improve relations with friendly

[305] Mehrdad Haghayeghi , *Islam and Politics in Central Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) , pp.15–18.
[306] Shirin Akiner, *Political and Economic Trends in Central Asia* (London: British Academic Press, 1994), p.146. Excise 'Cites Thrower, *Notes of Muslim Theological Education*'.
[307] Ibid., p.176.

Muslim countries'.[308] The easing of pressure on the Muslims had to do with the need for Muslim contribution to the war effort, the Soviet Union's subsequent rise in global status and its foreign policy that attempted to widen its sphere of influence in the Muslim Middle East. This strategy was pursued until the mid-1950s when the effects of the war had been overcome and Soviet authorities no longer needed religious support. The anti-religious campaign was once again reinvigorated as the Communist Party leadership began attacking religion. Khrushchev maintained that: 'Communist education proposes the liberation of consciousness from the religious prejudices and superstitions which still hamper some Soviet people from full demonstration of their creative powers'. He issued a decree entitled, 'On the strict observance of the laws on religious cults' in March 1961, a threefold strategy. First, an attack was to be launched against the clergy. Second, the existing anti-religious laws were to be thoroughly implemented. Third, the penalties for religious offences were made harsher. This was the official line taken in regard to religion, including Islam until the beginning of Perestroika. However, despite years of reprisal and persecution in the Soviet Union, Islam has managed to preserve its spirit as a way of life that culturally defined every facet of the believer's existence.[309] Sociological studies published in the Brezhnevite period document the astonishing persistence of both belief and practice. This was especially true of Islamic lifestyle rituals including, fasting, feasting, pilgrimages, polygamy and the handing out of alms.[310] In retrospect, the Soviet campaign against Islam had proved to be only partially successful. It managed to curb Islamic activity and perhaps contain Islamic sentiments in the region but it was far eradicating the Islamic faith.

When Gorbachev came to power in 1985, he set out to transform Soviet society through his policies of *perestroika* (radical economic restructuring and reform)

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[308] Oliver Roy, 'Islam in Tajikistan', *Open Society in Central Eurasia Occasional Paper Series*, No 1, July 1996.
[309] Ludmila Polonskaya and Alexei Malashenko, *Islam in Central Asia* (Reading, MA: Ithaca Press, 1994), p.110.
[310] Malik Hafeez, *Central Asia: Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), p.244.

and *glasnost* (policy of openness intended to ensure the success of perestroika). An inevitable product of this process was the gradual revival of Islam in Central Asia. Gorbachev had not anticipated this outcome because during the first years of his leadership, *glasnost* and *perestroika* encompassed neither Central Asia nor Islam. However, these reforms slowly found their way into the region. Mehrdad Haghayeghi describes two phases in the application and impact of *perestroika* and *glasnost* in Central Asia. He explains that the first phase lasted from 1985 until 1988. During this period, massive anti-corruption campaigns and party purges were conducted as Gorbachev attempted to establish tight control in the region. In fact, Gorbachev followed his predecessor's policies on religion during this phase and went so far as to blame Islamic culture for the socio-economic and political ills of Central Asia. Michael Rywkin makes an interesting point by suggesting that this policy was an instrument of a more generalized antinationalist and anti-Islamic strategy aimed at strengthening central control in the face of a Muslim population explosion and the dread possibility of nationalist contagion from turbulent Iran and Afghanistan.[311] The second phase corresponded to the 1988–1991 period when there was a change in Gorbachev's policy orientation—*glasnost* was permitted to be practiced relatively freely on a similar scale to other republics in the Soviet Union.[312] Moscow was forced to back away from its anti-Islamic policy because the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was visibly on the retreat, coming under attack by both the reformist wing of the Politburo leadership (led by Alexander Yakovlev) and by the 'nationalists' in the Baltic republics communist parties. To salvage the situation and to appease the demands of growing nationalism in the republics, the party began to grant the republic leaders more control over the ideological sphere, which including policies covering religion.[313] The trend towards liberalization resulted in quantitative changes for Islam in Central Asia. Among these changes was the

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311 Michael Rywkin, Moscow's Muslim Challenge, 2nd edn (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), p.150.
312 Haghayeghi , op cit, note 1, pp.48–49.
313 Anoushirvan Ehteshami, ed, *From the Gulf to Central Asia* (Exeter: Short Run Press, 1994). Cites Olcott, *Islamic Consciousnes s and Nationalist Ideology in Central Asia*, p.1.

drive to construct new mosques. The bureaucratic obstacles that had traditionally impeded the operation of mosques were removed, leading to the reopening of old mosques and new shrines. According to some figures, by 1992: in Uzbekistan, about 3000 mosques had been restored or built anew; in Tajikistan, 130 large town mosques were operating; and in Turkmenistan, 500 mosques were functioning in densely populated areas.[314] Publishing activities of the Muslim Religious Boards were expanded as well, resulting in the printing of more, book titles and the creation of a mass-circulation Muslim press. The *waqf* were re-established during this period, after being nationalized in the 1920s; this was very significant since it provided the clergy with an independent source of financing. With more resources at their disposal, clerically led religious institutions were in a better position to mobilize the community around the notions of Islam. Soon, clerics began a process of enlightenment in every republic, by educating ordinary Muslims with the history and philosophy of their religion and by promoting their notions of distinction and integration with regard to the Muslim community. Young educators in various fields of the humanities, and local journalists, joined in these efforts. The process of enlightenment was organically intertwined with nationalist sentiments and the notion of national revival was intertwined with Islam. As enlightenment became more pronounced and, as ethnic and nationalistic views grew, Islamic expression grew accordingly. Initially, the appearance of Islamic slogans and propaganda was seen as something new in Soviet practice, but by 1991, the hoisting of green flags was not unusual.[315] Ostensibly, a new trend was growing rapidly in Central Asian Islam, namely its politicization and the emergence of the Muslim religion as an independent political force.

Resurgence of Islam

[314] Polonskaya, op cit, note 5, pp.115–116, *Narorodnaya Gazeta*, Dushanbe.
[315] Dale F. Eikelman, ed, *Russia's Muslim Frontiers* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), p.67.

The resurgence of Islam in Central Asia began in the early 1970s with the emergence of small-scale revivalist movements in Tajikistan and the Fergana Valley (especially the Namangan district).[316] In these areas Islam had survived somewhat better than in most other parts of the region. The physical remoteness of these areas afforded a certain protection; so, too did the attitude of local officials, many of whom were less than conscientious in their attempts to stamp out religious practices. (Even Party members would sometimes observe Muslim rites, especially after retirement.) Moreover, some of the pre-Soviet generation of Central Asian Muslim scholars had sought refuge in these areas. (One of the most influential of such teachers was Muhammad Hindustani Rustamov, known as Hajji Domla. Born in Kokand in 1892, he studied in Bukhara, Afghanistan and India; he eventually returned to Tajikistan and died in Dushanbe in 1989. Several of his disciples became influential religious leaders.) Secretly, they began to teach the young. Small circles of adepts congregated around them and networks of devout believers began to be established. There were reports in the press of teahouses and clubs secretly being used for prayer meetings, of pilgrimages to shrines, and unregistered clerics performing religious ceremonies.[317]

The policy of glasnost put into practice by Mikhael Gorbachev in the mid-1980s meant that by 1988 the Soviet government relaxed its controls on Islam. As a result, there was a rapid religious revival, including new mosques, literature,[318] and the return of private religious schooling. Many Central Asians were interested in the ethical and spiritual values that Islam could offer.[319] The revival accelerated further following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. For many, Islam constituted a national heritage that had been repressed during the Soviet era. Additionally, relaxed travel restrictions under Gorbachev

316 Shirin Akiner, *S., Post-Soviet Central Asia*: The Islamic Factor, in U. Halbach (ed.), *The Development of the Soviet Successor States in Central Asia*, Cologne: Bundesinstitut fur ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien, 1995, pp.47-54.
317 Rashid, A., *The Resurgence of Central Asia*, London: Zed Books, 1994, p.44.
318 Schwab, Wendell. "Establishing an Islamic niche in Kazakhstan: Musylman Publishing House and its publications", *Central Asian Survey*, 30 (2): pp.227-242.
319 Khalid, Islam after Communism, (2007). Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, pp.65-71. pp. 120-121.

enabled cultural exchange with other Muslim countries; Saudi Arabia, for example, sent copies of the Qur'an into the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. Islam as practiced in Central Asia became much more varied in this short time.[320] Furthermore, Islam was attractive because it offered alternatives and solutions to the myriad political and economic problems facing the republics in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse.[321] However, the governments of Central Asian republics were wary of Islam in the political sphere. Their fears of undue influence were soon justified by the outbreak of the Tajik Civil War in 1992, between the Tajik government and a coalition of opponents led by a radical Islamist group called the Islamic Renaissance Party.[322] The civil war, which lasted until 1997, demonstrated to the other former Soviet republics the dangers posed by Islamic opposition groups. The takeover in 1996 of Afghanistan by the Taliban further emphasized that threat.[323] The Islamic Renaissance Party was one of several similar Islamic opposition groups, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which also fought against the Tajik government in the civil war. The IRP had its origins in underground Islamic groups in the Soviet Union. It was formed in 1990 in Astrakhan by a group consisting mostly of Tatar intellectuals, with separate branches for each Soviet republic. It was in fact registered as an official political party in Russia, but was banned by the Central Asian communist governments.[324] Partly as a result of this oppression, political opposition erupted into the violence of the civil war in Tajikistan, in which over 50,000 people were killed out of a population of 6 million and another 250,000 fled the country to Afghanistan, Uzbekistan or elsewhere.[325] Following the civil war, the Tajik government incorporated Islamic groups into the government in order to prevent future tensions. However, the other Central Asian republics did not follow this example, continuing instead to repress and persecute Islamic groups rather than

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320 Ibid., pp.121-123.
321 Routledge, Karagiannis, Emmanuel (2010). Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir. New York, New York, pp.20.
322 Rashid, Ahmed (2007). *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia.* Berkeley, California: University of California Press. pp.102.
323 Khalid, op. cit., pp.123.
324 Rashid, op. cit., pp.98.
325 Rashid, Ahmed (Spring, 2001). "The Fires of Faith in Central Asia". *World Policy Journal* 18 (1):pp. 50–52.

allow them to participate in the political process.[326] Not all Islamic movements were violent like the IRP; the most popular radical Islamic movement in Central Asia during the 1990s was the non-violent Hizb ut-Tahrir. Though it does not espouse the same violent methods as groups such as the IRP and IMU, its stated goal is to unite all Muslim countries through peaceful methods and replace them with a restored caliphate, due to which Central Asian governments consider it a threat and have outlawed it as a subversive group in the Central Asian republics.

Another, slightly, impetus for the resurgence of Islam was that towards the end of the 1980s (under Gorbachev), the government adopted a more tolerant policy toward religion. This was happening throughout the Soviet Union, but in Central Asia, it acquired a special momentum as part of a strategy to combat "fundamentalist" influences from Iran and Afghanistan. There was a widespread belief in official circles that the most effective defence against this perceived threat was to strengthen a sense of pride in indigenous Islamic traditions. This change of attitude was marked by the appointment of a new Mufti, Muhammad Sadyk, Muhammad Yusuf Hoja-ogli (less formally, Muhammad Sadyk or Mamayusupov), to head the MBCAK. In his early thirties, and previously Rector of the Tashkent madrasa, he was more in touch with the younger generation than the previous Mufti had been. He was a devout Muslim who genuinely believed that it was possible to liberalize the Soviet system. His affirmed aim was to provide every Muslim family in Central Asia with a copy of the Holy Quran. Like the "Wahhabis" (with whom he was said to have close personal links) he, too, believed in the need for moral regeneration. He believed that by re-inculcation of Muslim values it would be possible to overcome social evils such as growing alcoholism and drug abuse. He received substantial support from the state authorities, who not only gave him a prominent role in public affairs, but also made several concessions to the Muslim community, such as permission to open more mosques, the relaxing of

[326] Ibid. pp.53-55.

restrictions concerning the pilgrimage to Mecca, and the increased provision of religious literature. Several other young men (between 30 and 40 years of age) were appointed to senior positions in the Muslim establishment at this time, among them Akbar Turajonzade, the new head of the Tajik Qaziyat (Tajik branch of the Muslim Religious Board). Turajonzade, too, sought to promote Muslim regeneration by working within the framework of the existing law. Unlike some of the more radical "Wahhabis", he (like other members of the official religious hierarchy) was adamantly opposed to the politicization of Islam, and rejected the idea of the creation of Islamic parties. Furthermore, he was firmly convinced that it was too soon to think in terms of creating an Islamic state in Tajikistan, since there were far too few Tajiks who had any real knowledge of the faith. The first task, as he saw it, was to train teachers and clerics that could educate the masses. Among his many achievements at this time was the founding of an officially registered Islamic Institute in Dushanbe (1990), the publication of numerous booklets on Islam and the opening of over a hundred community ("Friday") mosques. So far as Turkmenistan is concerned neither the state nor the people are in favour of Islamic revival. They are satisfied with secularism and wanted to survive folk Islam.

CHAPTER - 4
STATE AND ISLAM IN POST SOVIET PERIOD

Formation of the State

Like other Central Asian Republics, Turkmenistan wanted greater autonomy, but not independence until the verge of dissolution of the Soviet Union.[327] Subsequent to the popular referendum, which resulted in 94 % of people being in favour of independence, Turkmenistan declared its independence on October 27, 1991, and the Soviet Union was formally dissolved on December 31, 1991.[328] Following the vote for independence, the president of Turkmenistan SSR Saparmurat Niyazov[329] established a new party called the "Democratic Party of Turkmenistan," which was composed of former Communist Party officials to a great extent.[330] He declared all opposition parties illegal, and any politicians openly opposed to Niyazov were either silenced or forced to live in exile.[331] Consequently, the independence acquired in 1991 did not result in a substantial change in the political structure. Niyazov was elected as the first president of independent Turkmenistan in June 1992 and maintained an authoritarian regime based on the rule of a single party, Democratic Party of Turkmenistan.[332] The centralized structure of the economy was preserved in a similar vein. Economic reforms were both slow and marginal, so that even the legalization of private property could only be achieved in 1997.[333] Even today; most of the industrial production is still performed by the state-owned

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327 Menon, Rajan, "In the shadow of the bear: Security in post-Soviet Central Asia", *International Security,* 20/1 (1995): p.153.

328 Habeeb, William Mark "Chapter 3: The history" in *Turkmenistan*, Philadelphia, Mason Crest, 2005, pp.25-48.

329 Horak, 'The ideology of the Turkmenbashy regime',Perspective on European Politics and Society, Vol. 6, Issue 2, Special Issue: Eurasia and the Wider World, Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2005, p.309.

330 Niyazov was an engineer serving as the First Secretary of the Ashkabat City Party Council when he was invited to work at Party headquarters in Moscow. He returned as the First Secretary of the Communist Party and controlled the policy of Turkmenistan during the last five years of the Soviet rule. He was elected as the president of Turkmenistan SSR in 1990, and maintained his post as the president of independent Turkmenistan Akbarzadeh, Shahram, "National identity and political legitimacy in Turkmenistan", *Nationalities Papers,* 27/2 (1999), pp.271-290.

331 Habeeb, William Mark, op cit., pp.25-48. The only opposition party in the republic, *Agzybirlik Khalq Kherketi* (Unity Popular Movement) was a society of native intelligentsia who were mainly concerned with language and environmental/health issues, which had a potential to touch emotions and mobilize people, particularly in urban centers. Akbarzadeh, op. cit., pp.271-272; Roy, Olivier, *The New Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Birth of Nations,* New York, London, New York University Press, 2000. p.135.

332 Akbarzadeh, op. cit., pp.272-273; Kiepenheuer-Drechsler, Barbara, "Trapped in permanent neutrality: looking behind the symbolic production of the Turkmen nation", *Central Asian Survey*, 25/1 (2006): pp.129-141; Ochs, Michael, "Turkmenistan: The quest for stability and control" in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot (eds.) *Conflict, cleavage, and change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp.312-359.

333 Habeeb, William Mark ,op cit., pp.25-48.

enterprises, particularly in the essential gas, oil, and cotton industries. The constitution adopted in 1992 stated that Turkmenistan was a constitutional republic "based on the principles of the separation of powers – legislative, executive, and judicial – which operate independently, checking and balancing one another."[334] It also recognizes and guarantees to protect freedoms of speech, assembly, and religion for the individuals. However, the reality was very different from the constitutional rhetoric. Although there were legislative and judiciary bodies, the separation of powers was never put into practice but instead these bodies remained shadowed by the decisions of the president. Similarly, the individual rights stated in the constitution were either denied or suppressed.[335] The constitution granted enormous powers to president Niyazov, who was also entitled to serve as chairman of the cabinet of ministers and the two parliamentary bodies of the republic.[336] In 1994, a referendum was approved cancelling the elections planned to be held in 1998 and extending Turkmenbashi's term as president until 2002. In 1999, the parliament voted to make Turkmenbashi president for life. He later stated that he would voluntarily step down in 2010, when he would reach age 70.[337] The legislative branch of the republic consists of two parliamentary bodies: *Halk Maslahaty* (People's Council) and *Mejlis* (Parliament). *Halk Maslahaty* is the highest representative body of the new Republic of Turkmenistan as the authority to ratify constitutional amendments, treaties, and referendums. The president is the chairman of *Halk Maslahaty* whose members are comprised of the cabinet ministers; regional, district, and city *hakims* (governors and mayors); parliamentary deputies; people's representatives elected by *etraps* (district); the chairmen of the Supreme Court and the Economic Court; and the general prosecutor.[338] The *Mejlis* is the legislative body with a relatively limited

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334 Habeeb, William Mark, "*Chapter 4: Politics, the economy, and religion*" in *Turkmenistan*, Philadelphia, Mason Crest, 2005. pp.49-76.
335 Ibid.,
336 1992 Constitution recognized Turkmenbashi as the chairman for life of the People's council, while his supreme leadership of Mejlis was entitled by a law passed in 2003. Habeeb, op. cit., pp. 49-76.
337 Ibid.,; Horak, op. cit., pp.305-319.
338 Coleman, Denise Youngblood (ed.), *Turkmenistan: 2010 Country Review,* Houston, Texas, CountryWatch, Inc., 2010, pp.8-9; Shahram Akbarzadeh, op.cit., p.276; Sir, Jan, "Halk Maslahaty in the context of the

authority and is elected for a five-year term.[339] Nevertheless, most of the decisions were made by president Turkmenbashi himself while both *Halk Maslahaty* and *Mejlis* merely reflected them.[340] In a similar vein, Turkmenbashi had a great influence over the legal system due to his authority to appoint judges at all levels for five-year terms, which could be renewed indefinitely.[341] He also appointed the Minister of Justice, who is supposed to oversee all judges and courts.[342] During his rule, Turkmenbashi did not even pretend to adhere to the liberal principles mentioned in the constitution but instead "crafted a dictatorship based on a 'cult of the individual.'[343] He was demanding complete loyalty from his officials, in other words *nomenclature*, and from society at large, while encouraging the same attitude to be duplicated at all levels of authority and ensuring this by means of KNB[344] to serve "perpetuating the culture of obedience."[345] People appointed by Turkmenbashi to reinforce obedience to his absolutism also headed the Ministry of National Security and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, both being responsible for management of internal threats to regime.[346] Although the constitution recognizes the right to express personal opinions freely; Turkmenbashi government severely restricted freedom of speech as well as freedom of the press. Political opposition was taken as personal betrayal. Questioning a presidential decision meant dismissal for a public officer, while dissent at all levels of society were punished by imprisonment, house arrest, surveillance, incarceration in psychiatric facilities and torture.[347] The government also had complete control over radio and television, and was funding almost all print

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constitutional evolution of post-Soviet Turkmenistan", *Perspectives on European Politics & Society,* 6/2 (2005): pp.321-330.

339 Coleman, *op. cit.,* pp.8-9.

340 Coleman, op. cit., p. 12; Horak, op. cit., pp.307-308.

341 Habeeb, op cit., pp.49-76.

342 Ibid.,

343 McFaul, Michael, "The fourth wave of democracy and dictatorship: Noncooperative transitions in the postcommunist world", *World Politics,* 54/2 (2002): pp.233.

344 Committee for National Security, which is inspired by Soviet KGB

345 Akbarzadeh, op. cit., p.278; Coleman, op. cit., p.11.

346 Habeeb, op.cit., pp.49-76.

347 Brown, Bess, "Governance in Central Asia: The case of Turkmenistan", *Helsinki Monitor*, 14/3 (2003): pp.208; Ash, Lucy, "Central Asia's new idol", *New Statesman,* 135/ 4808 (2006): p.33; Denber, Rachel, "Cruelty behind a joke", *New Statesman*, 135/4799 (2006): p.14; Remnick, David, "The land of Turkmenbashi", *New Yorker,* 82/11 (2006): pp.34-36; Hilsum, Lindsey, "World view", *New Statesman,* 134/4721 (2005): p.23.

media.[348] The result was what the regime called "stability": virtually no rallies, meetings, demonstrations, or protests.[349] It was practically impossible to figure out whom, other than Turkmenbashi, had a real influence in policymaking or whose interests he had to accommodate.[350] Nevertheless, it is possible to recognize that he was careful to appease tribal concerns and balance tribal aspirations.[351] Although he was from the Tekke tribe, his experience in the state orphanage let him introduce himself as the "son of the Turkmen people", who stands at an equal distance to any tribe.[352] Furthermore, like Soviet governments previously did, he was trying to maintain equity among tribes in his political decisions, such as appointing *hakims* from respective local tribes rather than appointing outsiders.[353] Although reproduction of the old Soviet patterns of relations between state and society has been a common characteristic of all post-communist states, Turkmenistan proved to be an extreme example for both the marginality of change and the amplitude of authoritarianism.[354] Neither economic nor political structures were subject to a tangible change throughout the transition, and the authoritarianism of the state was preserved, if not enhanced, despite the set forth rhetoric of democracy. A very basic reason underlying such an outcome was the strong tradition of authoritarian rule, which the Turkmen respected throughout their history and remained unchallenged without an alternative culture influential upon the elites and the society – let it be previous experiences of democracy or a civic political culture.[355] The prevalence of Soviet modalities were also facilitated by the specific path of transition itself, which was from its very beginnings in Gorbachev period characterized by lack of an effective political opposition, decentralization of power or ongoing economic reforms to undermine the

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348 Coleman, op. cit., p.11; Ugur, Halil, "Turkmenistan: political, economic, and international developments in the wake of Soviet imperialism", *Journal of Third World Studies,* 13/1 (1996): p.17.
349 Ochs, op .cit., p.313.
350 *Ibid.,* p.331.
351 *Ibid.,* pp.312-359.
352 Akbarzadeh, op. cit., p.274.
353 Roy, op. cit., p.115.
354 Benningsen, Alexander and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A Guide*, London, C. Hurst and Company, 1985, pp.168-177.
355 Parrot, Bruce, "Perspectives on postcommunist democratization" in K. Dawisha and B. Parrot (eds.) *Conflict, cleavage, and change in Central Asia and the Caucasus,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp.1-39.

control of Communist Party elites over the evolving course of transition.[356] In the absence of political, structural, or economic challenges to his power, Turkmenbashi was able to preserve his assets and ensured his position throughout the transition to block both democratization and economic reformation of the independent Turkmen state.[357]

Nation-building policy of the Turkmen state

Turkmenistan has been in transition from dependence to independence and from socialism to market economy. Its national identity is constructed within these unstable conditions. Following the declaration of independence, the process of nation building was initiated by President Saparmurat Turkmenbashi to fill the identity vacuum and create a new homogenous Turkmen national identity.[358] Turkmenbashi uses the term 'national revival' instead of 'nation-building '.[359] The latter, however, defines the current situation in Turkmenistan better than the former since Turkmen national identity did not occur in modern understanding until the foundation of the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924.[360] Paradoxically, the Soviet Union was the initiator of Turkmen nation building. Following the establishment of Turkmenistan SSR, the 'Turkmen nation' met Stalin's four criteria of nationhood: unity of language, territory, economy, and historical culture.[361] Turkmen nation building, however, was not consolidated in the Soviet era. During that period, the Turkmen nation continued to be 'a tribal confederation rather than a modern nation', mainly

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30 Fish, Steven, "Post communist subversion: social science and democratization in East Europe and Eurasia", *Slavic Review*, 58/4 (1999): pp.799-823.

31 Bunce,Valerie, "The political economy of postsocialism", *Slavic Review,* 58/4 (1999): pp.756-793; Walder, Andrew, "Elite opportunity in transitional economies", *American Sociological Review*, 68/6 (2003): pp.899-916.

358 Azamat Sarsembayev, "Imagined communities: Kazak nationalism and Kazakification in the 1990s", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 18, No 3, 1999, pp.319–346; Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Nation-building in Uzbekistan", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1996, pp.23–32; William O. Beeman, "The struggle for identity in post- Soviet Tajikistan", *MERIA Journal*, Vol 3, No 4, 1999; Pal Kolsto, "Nation-building in the former USSR", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol 7, No 1, 1996, pp.118–132.

359 Turkmenistan: Stability, Reforms, Neutrality: The Fragments of Speeches, Interviews and Talks by Saparmurat Turkmenbashi (Ashgabat: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, 1996), p.13.

360 Adrienne Lynn Edgar, "Nationality policy and national identity: the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic, 1924–1929", *Journal of Central Asian Studies*, Vol 1, No 2, 1997, pp.2–20; Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Narrative of independenc e in Central Asia. A case study: Turkmenistan", *Journal of Arabic, Islamic, and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 2, No 2, 1995, p.92.

361 Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay , "From tribe to umma", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 3, No 3, 1985, p.21.

because of the persistence of endogamy and dialect between tribes.[362] One of the main reasons of the remaining efficacy of tribal identities *vis-a-vis* the national one was the internal contradiction of Soviet identity policies. Moscow, on the one hand, tried to create national identities in Central Asia to destroy overarching Islamic and Turkestani identities,[363] while on the other, it aimed to create *Homo Sovieticus* (pseudo-Latin for "Soviet Man") , restricting national identities.[364] In this regard, Moscow promoted Russian language and culture in Turkmenistan instead of authentic Turkmen values and prohibited nationalist studies and movements. Following the declaration of independence, Under the direction of Turkmenbashi, the Turkmen State initiated the nation building policy to fill the ideological vacuum, to maintain the source of legitimacy for the new nation-state, and to adapt to the international system. The governmental nation building policy has two main goals, the unity of Turkmen tribes and gradual socio-cultural de-Russification of Turkmenistan. These goals are pursued through promoting Turkmen as the vernacular language, using history writing and propaganda, controlling education, and channeling the media to transmit symbols and narratives. The development of Turkmen as the vernacular language both helps to maintain national homogeneity as a 'national glue' extinguishing differences between tribal dialects and to weaken the influence of the Russian culture. Tribal identities, especially the five biggest ones, Teke, Yomut, Ersary, Salyr, and Saryk, are still influential in social life.[365] The lack of a hierarchical mechanism and leadership within the tribes is a historical legacy,[366] that weakens the current political roles and influences of the tribes. Although Turkmenbashi is from the Teke tribe, his tribal loyalty is not strong since he grew up in an orphanage. He does not seek the dominance of the culture of Teke, the biggest tribe that was

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362 Alexander Benningsen and S. Enders Wimbush, op cit., pp.95, 98.
363 Kemal Karpat, "The old and new Central Asia", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 12, No 4, 1993, pp.415–425.
364 Nazif Shahrani, "Central Asia and the challenge of the Soviet Legacy", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 12, No 2, 1993, pp.128–131.
365 Some of the other tribes are; Ogurcaly, Cowdur, Goklen, Nohurly, Murceli, Alili, Sakar, Yemreli, Garadasly, Hydyrili, Ata, Hoca and Sih. Marat Durdyyew and Sohrat Kadyrow, *Dunyedeki Turkmenler* (Ashgabat: Harp, 1991), p.15.
366 Paul Georg Geiss, "Turkmen tribalism", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 18, No 3, 1999, pp.347–357.

politically effective during the Soviet period.[367] Turkmenbashi's goal is to create a shared Turkmen culture. He defines the governmental policy on the unity of tribes as 'national revival' by returning to the real history and spiritual sources, rather than 'nation building'.[368] According to him, what is happening in Turkmenistan is only the rediscovery of the forgotten national identity: 'by forming an independent and totally neutral Turkmen state, by uniting a number of tribes into a whole, we did not create a new nation; what we did was to return its national pivot, which used to be strong and powerful but has been shattered by the blows of the historical fate'.[369] In Turkmenistan, a new state, the media, and education are crucial to the advancement of the imagination of national identity. Anderson's explanations are significant to understand whether Turkmen national identity is a perennial and fixed or a socially constructed phenomenon. It is necessary to analyze the role of the state in Turkmen nation building. For these reasons, governmental policies in Turkmenistan will be analyzed through the lens of four features: the development of vernacular language, the media, history writing, propaganda, and education.

The development of Turkmen as the vernacular language-of-state is the main pillar of Turkmen nation building. After the declaration of independence, a constitutional change made Turkmen the official language, reversing the linguistic degeneration of the Soviet period.[370] Although Russian is still used in bureaucracy and daily life, as well as in the interethnic communication, but it is diminishing now.[371] Turkmenbashi criticizes the widespread use of Russian and encourages its limitation. In October 1999, the state radio ceased its Russian language news broadcast.[372] In July 2000, Turkmenbashi declared that all

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367 Lemercier-Quelquejay, op cit, note 4, p.23.
368 *Turkmenistan: Stability, Reforms, Neutrality: The Fragments of Speeches, Interviews and Talks by Saparmurat Turkmenbashi* (Ashgabat: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, 1996), p.13.
369 Ibid., p.19.
370 David Nissman, "Turkmenistan: just like old times", in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds.), *New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.644–645.
371 Myratgeldi Soyegow *et al*., *Turkmen Dili* 6 (IÇ stanbul: MEB Basomevi, 1996), p.5.
372 1999 Country Report on Human Rights Practices Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 25 February 2000.

officials must speak Turkmen. He also fired Boris Shikhmuradov, his foreign minister since 1993, criticizing his knowledge of Turkmen.[373] It is now popular to replace Russian names with Turkmen alternatives. The administrative terms, such as *oblast* (province), *rayon* (district or small city), and *kolhoz* (farmer union) have been replaced with *velayat*, *etrap* and *dayhan birlesigi*. Official slogans such as *garaş̧syzlyk* (independence), *bitaraplyk* (neutrality), *agzybirlik* (solidarity), *galkynyş̧* (development) and the names of political institutions , e.g. 'Halk Maslahaty' and the 'Mejlis', are all selected from original Turkmen rather than Russian. The development of Turkmen as the vernacular language also results in the decrease of tribal dialects. Turkmen, especially as a written language, is spread nationwide to maintain national homogeneity as a 'national glue' extinguishing differences between tribal dialects. The media and the schools play key roles in this policy.

Television, radio, and newspapers are important means of governmental nation building policy in Turkmenistan. They focus on the propaganda of nationalism and on praising the President. Turkmenbashi is accepted as the main symbol of nation building representing national solidarity. On the main TV news programme, *Watan Habarlar Gepleş̧igi* (national news), there is almost no news except for the President's declarations or activities. The programme starts with a good wish and prayer for Turkmenbashi. When speaking about the President, the TV and radio commentators use epithets, such as compassionate, merciful, and esteemed. Similarly, every day, large photos of Turkmenbashi cover the first page of all newspapers.[374] In addition to media propaganda, hundreds of places and institutions have been named or renamed 'Turkmenbashi' all around Turkmenistan. Turkmenbashi's posters and sculptures decorate the main buildings of Ashgabat. His picture also appears on the national currency, *manat*. Turkmenbashi shows respect for other national symbols, e.g. he kisses the flag on some memorial days, and

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[373] *RFE/RL Turkmen Report*, 30 July—5 August 2000, op. cit.

[374] Most of the well-known newspapers , such as *Turkmenistan, Neytralniy Turkmenistan (Russian), Galkynys,* and *Adalat* are sponsored by Turkmenbashi.

architectural structures, such as the Neutrality Arch, the Earthquake Memorial and the National Museum, have been constructed as tangible symbols of national identity. They are shown in TV broadcasts as the symbols of independent, permanently neutral, and rapidly developing Turkmenistan. The Turkmenbashi Palace, for instance, is regularly represented on TV programmes. Historical figures are also used as the symbols of nation building. Magtymguly (1733–1797), for instance, became one of the significant symbols. He was not only a pious poet, but also a wise social leader.[375] He tried to solve socio-political problems integrating Turkmen tribes. He wrote in the Turkmen language, in folk manner and parts of his poems about tribal unity today appear on large billboards on avenue of Ashgabat:

Bir suprada tayyar kylynsa as¸lar,
Go teriler ol ykbaly Turkmenin!
(If dinner is prepared in a shared table,
The good fortune for Turkmens will appear!)

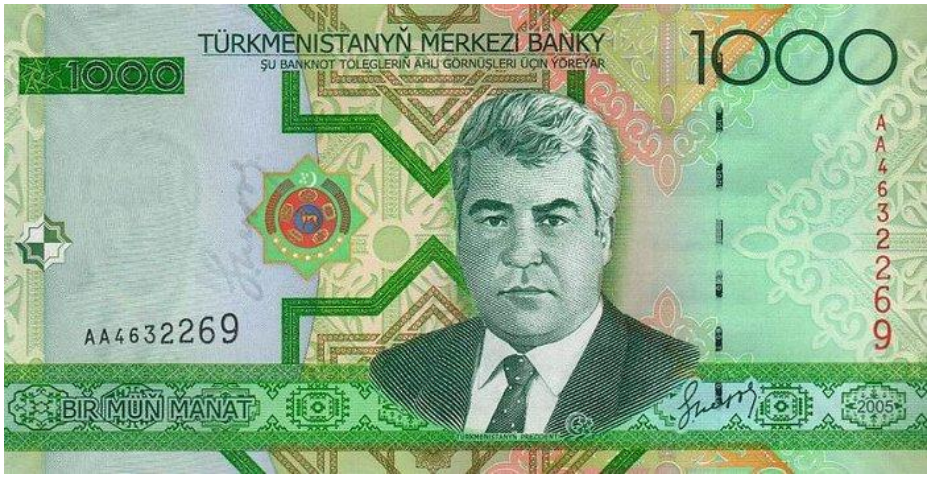

Fig 8: (Manat)
Source: http://aes.iupui.edu/rwise/countries/turkmenistan.html

[375] S.A. Niyazov (ed.), *Turkmenistan: Kici Ensiklopedya* (Ashgabat, 1996), p.333.

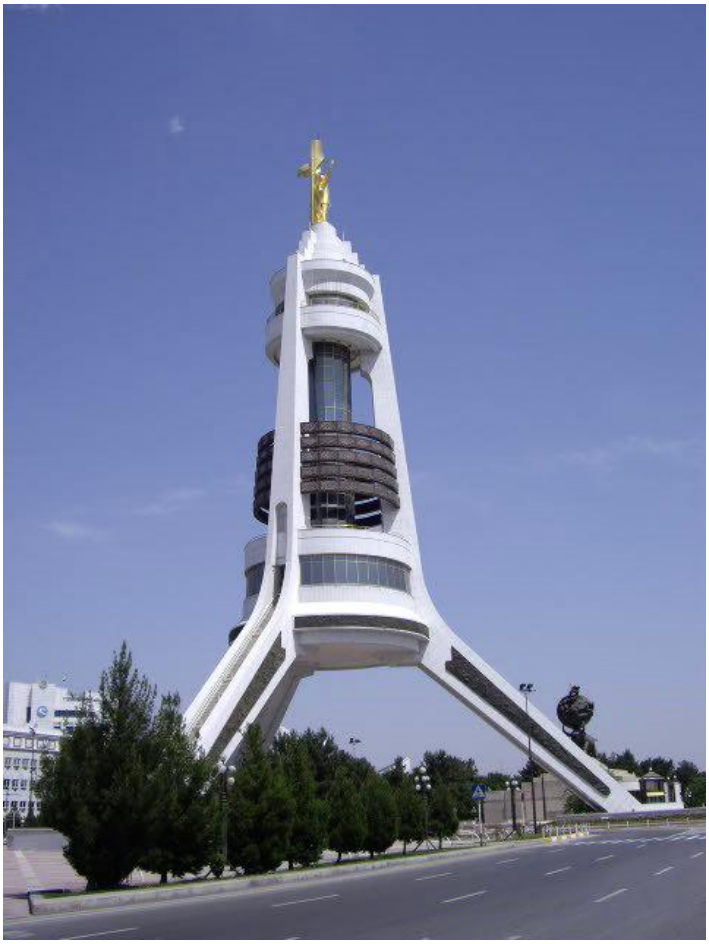

Fig 9: (Neutrality Arch)
Source: http://dlewis.net/nik-archives/neutrality-arch-of-turkmenistan/

Fig 10: (Earthquake Memorial)
Source: http://www.agefotostock.com/en/Stock-Images/Rights-Managed/YB6-1420823

Fig 11: (National Museum)
Source: http://www.unesco.kz/heritagenet/tm/turkm_muz/

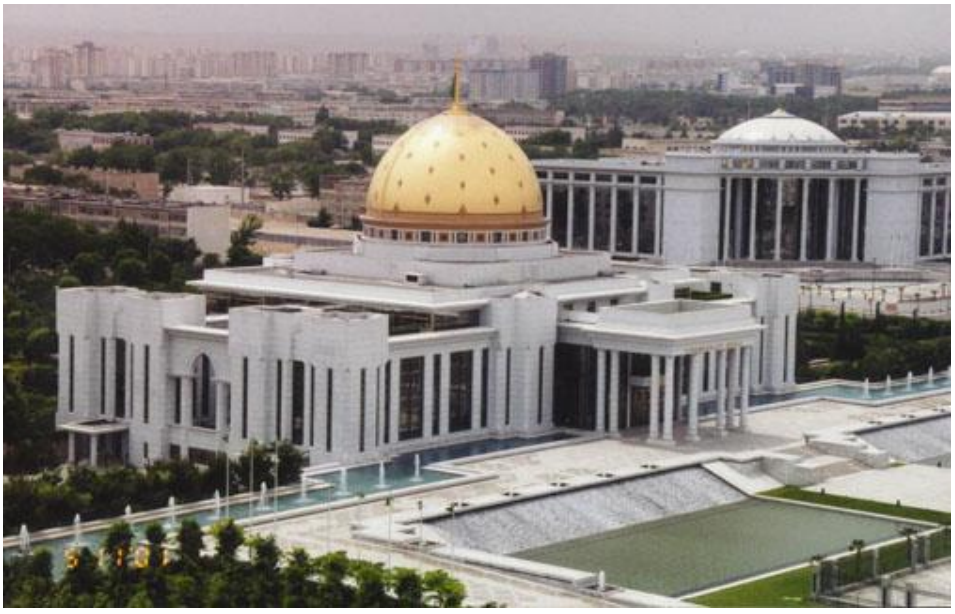

Fig 12: (Turkmenbashi Palace)
Source: http://www.galenfrysinger.com/turkmenbashi.htm

Slogans are crucial in the discourse of Turkmen nation building. TV news, for instance, starts with the slogan of the President: 'The 21st century will be the golden age of Turkmens!' The most widespread official motto, '*Halk, Watan, Turkmenbas¸y*' (People, Motherland, Turkmenbashi), can be seen in many

places. The propaganda of the President also appears as slogans on highways, e.g. *Presidentin¯ sozi kanundyr*! (The word of President is the law!).[376] Another important synthetic dimension of national identities in general is the narratives.[377] Turkmen government creates narratives to promote the imagination of national identity. The main narrative is *baki bitaraplyk* (permanent neutrality), the main pillar of Turkmen foreign policy, which provides an example of interplay between identity and foreign policy in Turkmenistan. The UN accepted the permanent neutrality of Turkmenistan in 1995. Given the neutrality status, Turkmenistan is committed to peace-loving principles, refusing to maintain or produce weapons of mass destruction, to participate into military pacts and to start or to take side in military conflicts.[378] Television and radio broadcasts frequently repeat this phrase: 'The first country, which is accepted as permanently neutral by the UN, is our fatherland Turkmenistan. All Turkmens have the right to be proud of their fatherland. Therefore, it is compulsory for all of us to serve our fatherland.' Television and radio broadcasts, poems, songs and speeches praise *garaş¸syz, baki bitarap* (independent and permanently neutral) Turkmenistan and its *merhemetli* (merciful) President. Despite indoctrination, few Turkmens understand the political meaning of neutrality. Some of them optimistically argue that because of its neutrality status, Turkmenistan cannot be invaded and it could become the regional centre of Central Asia.[379]

One of the pillars of Turkmen nation building is the writing of history, which focuses on the transmission of national history in schools and by the media. Official Soviet history emphasized the civilizing and progressive mission of the

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376 This slogan is written by a highway near to Buzmein City.

377 Dennis-Constan t Martin, "The choices of identity", *Social Identities*, Vol 1, No 1, pp.8, 10.

378 Muhammad H. Abalakov (ed.), *Turkmenistan: Today and Tomorrow* (Ashgabat, 1999), p.18. Turkmenistan is committed not to start military conflict or war except in self-defence; to refrain from political, diplomatic, or other moves that might lead to armed conflict or to take side in a conflict; not to participate into military pacts; not to maintain, produce, or transfer nuclear, chemical, biological and other weapons of mass destruction; and to refrain from leasing its territory for the deployment of foreign military bases. *The Constitution of Turkmenistan* (Articles 5 and 6).

379 Interviews conducted by Ahmet T. Kuru, Ashgabat , February—June 1999.

'Big brother', Russia, and tried to suppress Turkmen nationalism.[380] After 1991, Turkmen history writing has focused on three issues: changing the Soviet paradigm, emphasizing unique Turkmen national history rather than shared Turkic history and maintaining national solidarity by uniting the history of tribes and regions. According to Anderson, national history writing aims to emphasize some historical events, which consolidate national unity, as well as to omit some others, which might threaten national solidarity. Turkmen history writing seeks these two aims. It emphasizes historical events like the Goktepe War as a part of common national history, while omitting the clashes between tribes. National history writings generally include 'golden ages', which provide a vision for future. The 'golden age' of Turkmen history writing was the era of the Seljuk Empire (1040–1194). A large museum was built in Ashgabat to exhibit the remains of the Seljuk Empire as well as the history of independent Turkmenistan. As a part of its history policy, many places, including the streets and institutes in Ashgabat, have been named or renamed after historical figures, such as Magtymguly, Azady (the father of Magtymguly, 1700–1760), and Gorogly (a legendary hero). Commemorative holidays are one of the main ways to celebrate national identities.[381] Turkmenistan officially accepted many memorial days honouring national history.[382] On these days, the media focuses on national and ethical values. The comment of the official press about Goktepe War's Memorial Day is a good example of the official policy on history writing: January 12 is the most sorrowful date in Turkmen history. That day, 118 years ago, a tragic event took place near the walls of the ancient citadel, Goktepe. The outnumbering tsarist colonial troops attacked the fortress. Everyone rose up to defend the fortress, homeland, and the nation's honour. All the Turkmens from Mary, Lebap, Dashkhovuz, Balkan, and Ahal joined the battle against the invaders. Since then January 12 has been a sacred

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380 John Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), pp.86–88.

381 Fred Halliday, 'Nationalism', in John Baylis and Steve Smith (eds.), *The Globalization of World Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.368.

382 Some of these days are Anniversary of Turkmenistan Independence , The Renaissance and Unity Day, Holiday of the State Flag and the Birthday of the President, and Day of Turkmenistan Neutrality. There are also many special days that are not official holidays, such as the Election Day of the First President of Turkmenistan, the Turkmen Horses Holiday, the Magtymguly Poetry Day, and the Turkmen Carpets Holiday (Abalakov, op cit, note 29, p.25).

day for the Turkmen people. The victims of the Goktepe battle were the soldiers of the tsar army too, executing the imperial will of Russia. The Presidential Decree on establishing the Memorial Day (dated December 8, 1990) says that neither Turkmen nor Russian and other people are guilty in the Goktepe tragedy. Conquerors' expansion is the true reason for the bloodshed. Independence, gained in the century-old search for freedom, gave the Turkmen people the right to know it, the genuine history of Motherland, and their own roots, to revere the memory of heroic ancestors.[383]

This comment emphasizes several aspects of national history writing in Turkmenistan. First, during the Soviet period, historical truth was hidden and, after the declaration of independence, 'the genuine history' started to be taught. Second, the Russian invasion was 'colonialist' and 'imperialist'. Third, the Russian people are not guilty of that colonialism and there is no enmity among Turkmens towards Russians.[384] Fourth, the Goktepe War was an 'honourable' and 'national' war. Finally, the Goktepe War was the shared battle of Turkmens of all *velayat*s (regions), rather than only Ahal *velayat*, where the Goktepe War occurred. Another important project of history writing is the planned book entitled *Ruhnama* (the soul book), which will include historical, cultural and other aspects of the 'Turkmen soul'. Turkmenbashi has stated that '*Ruhnama* will be the second landmark book of Turkmens (after the Quran)'.[385] *Ruhnama* is also the name of Turkmenbashi's policy of cultural and spiritual revival. This policy sometimes results in autocratic manipulation of historical facts. For instance, in September 2000, Turkmenbashi ordered the destruction of 25,000 new histories textbooks, arguing that their authors had committed treason against the country's past by ignoring 'the Turkmen origin and character' of Turkmenistan, overstating the role of other nations in its national

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383 *Turkmenistan News Weekly*, 11 January 1999, cited in Kuru, Ahmet 'Between the state and cultural zones: nation building in Turkmenistan', *Central Asian Survey* (2002) 21(1), p.77.

384 For instance, there is still a sculpture of Lenin in Ashgabat and Soviet monuments in Mary. Furthermore, the day of the defeat of Nazi Germany by the USSR is still a memorial day, the Victory Day.

385 *Adalat* (newspaper), 16 April 1999, op. cit. p.77.

history and writing that Turkmens originated not in what is modern Turkmenistan but in the Altai mountains. He criticized the authors as follows: 'You hardly mention the Turkmen people in your book. You apparently did not listen to what I said in my speeches.'[386] Turkmenbashi and other Turkmen politicians, however, should not forget that 'It is one thing to establish such traditions and "discover" such history; it is quite another to ensure their lasting success and popular acceptance'.[387]

The Turkmen government focuses on the propaganda and indoctrination of national idealism and self-sacrifice to prevent egoistic tendencies, which are encouraged by severe economic problems.[388] Turkmenbashi emphasizes the significance of the spread of national feeling as follows: 'The country will flourish when each person in it, young or old, strongly develops the feeling of patriotism.'[389] Turkmenbashi has attempted to set up a direct relationship with citizens in order to ignite national consciousness by using such methods as a direct mail system and visits to urban and rural areas. Another source of contact between the President and citizens is dialogue meetings. The official press reported on one of these meetings in February 1999, describing it as a 'Presidential *lesson* of truth, courage, and love for the native land': Solving daily, hourly a lot of important public tasks, the President never forgets about this task too—*to educate the people.* He frankly says, 'I could have put bread and butter on your table, but then nobody would like to work. And who will develop and improve the land?' Silence is in the hall; a lofty truth is in the words of the leader. 'We have to change our psychology', says the President, meaning the participants of the rural meeting and the people of the country. 'To change the consciousnesses'—what does this mean? First of all, to learn to rely upon ourselves in everything—on our energy, will, love for the native land

386 Paul Goble, "Turkmenistan: analysis from Washington. Rewriting the future", *RFE/RL Newsline*, 2 October 2000.
387 Anthony Smith, "The nation: invented, imagined, reconstructed", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol 20, No 3, 1991, p.359.
388 The average monthly salary is between US $10–50 and the per capita GNP is US $992. Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Profile: Turkmenistan 1997–1998*, p.59.
389 *The Policy of Saparmurat Turkmenbashi : Achievements and Prospects* (Ashgabat: Archives Fund of the President of Turkmenistan, 1996), p.236.

and native people, beloved Motherland. When the hall in one breath pronounced *the sacred oath* of devotion to Motherland and President, not a shadow of doubt, no insincerity and falsity were in the voices of participants.[390] This 'sacred oath' (*kasem*), which is recited each day in schools and frequently in public events, aims to consolidate the loyalty of citizens to the Turkmen nation and its President:

Glorious Turkmenistan, my motherland, I would sacrifice my life for you!
For the slightest evil against you, let my hand be lost!
For the slightest slander about you, let my tongue be lost!
At the moment of my betrayal, to my motherland, Turkmenistan,
To my President, let my life be annihilated![391]

This oath reflects three governmental principles. First, the Turkmen motherland, for which citizens could sacrifice their own life, and its President are glorified. Second, collectivism is desired more than individualism. Finally, the concepts of obedience and betrayal are understood in a monolithic and rigid manner. Education is crucial both to indoctrinate national imagination and feelings and to maintain social control. There is a course called 'The Policy of Turkmenbashi' taught in schools and universities, which aims to propagate official policies of national revival. Turkmenbashi stresses the importance of patriotic and moral education. In April 1999, for instance, he criticized the Minister of Education for his failure to attach satisfactory importance to these issues.[392] Turkmen national education emphasizes the significance of citizenship to the members of the minorities. One of the history course-books, for example, stresses 'Dear students, you can be children of different nations, Turkmen, Uzbek, Russian, Kazak, Armenian, Belorussian, Azeri; but you are

[390] *Turkmenistan News Weekly*, 8 February 1999, op cit. p.78.
[391] "I partially changed the official English translation of the 'oath', because, it is softer than the original Turkmen version." (Niyazov)
[392] *Turkmenistan News Weekly*, 19 April 1999, op. cit. p.79.

all the young citizens of independent and neutral Turkmenistan. Independent and neutral Turkmenistan is your country.'[393]

Nature of the State

When Turkmenistan achieved its independence on October 27, 1991, the new independent Turkmen state under the leadership of Saparmurat Turkmenbashi did not bring freedom to the country but instead established one of the most isolated and authoritarian regimes of the contemporary world characterized by extremities and contradictions. The state, claiming to be the agent of revival, authenticity and emancipation against the notorious Soviet legacy; was indeed a political and structural continuation of the Turkmen SSR and was most of the time reproductive of Soviet-style socio-political modalities of public control and suppression, particularly regarding its authoritarianism, isolationism and intensive propaganda campaigns. The president of this state, claiming to be the father of the Turkmen; was not only among the most authoritarian leaders of the century but was also ignorant of the real social and economic needs of his people behind populist policies and investments. Despite the huge oil and gas reserves, Turkmen people could hardly make their livelihoods and were suffering from serious scarcities of basic public services. The state was prosperous enough to construct public facilities like an ice-skating palace or a Disneyland, but it had to shut down all hospitals in rural areas to be able to finance the ones in the capital.[394] Nevertheless, the future was painted in bright colours - as long as the Turkmen took the spiritual guidance of *Ruhnama*, the semi-religious book written by Turkmenbashi himself. Beneath the surface, the peculiar regime of Turkmenbashi was a quest for his own self-survival against the challenges of an inherently fragmented social structure. While he was benefiting from many traditional values and customs to justify his rule, the persistence of tribal identities over a unifying national identity was a challenge to legitimacy and continuity of his regime. The fragility of regime was pushing

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393 Tacnazar Myratgeldiyev, *Turkmenistanyn Taryhy*–8 (Asgabat: Magaryf, 1997), p.6.

394 Dadabaev, Timur, "Trajectories of political development and public choices in Turkmenistan", *Asian Affairs: An American Review,* 34/ 3 (2007): pp.136.

for increased levels of suppression and oppression, which was in turn exacerbating the need for populist policies.

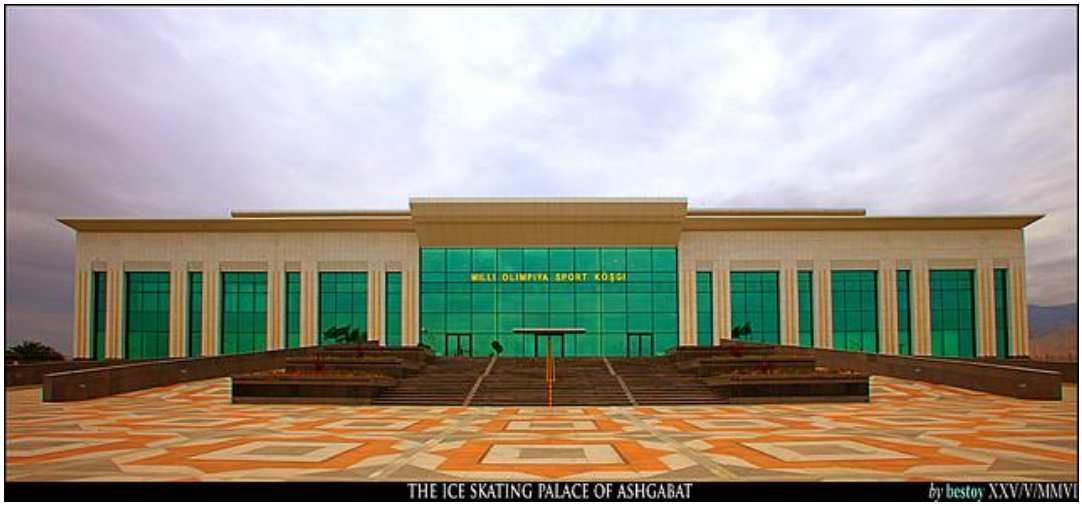

Fig 13: (ice-skating palace)
Source: http://oursurprisingworld.com/ashgabat-turkmenistanarchitectural-photo-part-3/

Niyazov's Legacy

Niyazov's more than twenty years in power set his country on a path towards self-destruction. Although its natural gas reserves provide great wealth, the regime used this to its own benefit, creating a cult of personality while systematically dismantling civil society, education, and health care. Vast amounts of money from the export of hydrocarbons were kept locked away in special offshore accounts. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkmenistan quickly became one of the world's most isolationist and repressive states. Styling himself 'Turkmenbashi' – 'Leader of the Turkmen' – a title he later embellished with the epithets '*Serdar*' (Leader) and '*Beyik*' (the Great), Niyazov constructed a massive cult of personality. His portrait was ubiquitous on banknotes, buildings and the corner of the screen of every television program broadcast by Turkmenistan's exclusively state-controlled television channels. Most prominent was his fondness for erecting giant monuments to himself, including golden statues, sprawling palaces, two mosques, one accompanied by an enormous mausoleum dedicated to his family

members in his native town of Gypchak.[395] Niyazov renamed months of the year and days of the week.[396] He also inscribed his name on the landscape, renaming the Caspian Sea port city of Krasnovodsk Turkmenbashy in 1993. In 2001, Niyazov published the *Ruhnama* (Book of the Spirit), which contained his musings on Turkmen history, culture, and traditions and soon became mandatory at all levels of education; those seeking driver's licenses or state employment were required to pass a test on the *Ruhnama*, which was also honoured as a month (September) and accorded a monument in the centre of Ashgabat. Phrases from it were inscribed beside Quranic verses on mosques. Niyazov said in 2006 that anyone who read his book three times was guaranteed to go to heaven. In 2004, he published a second volume of the *Ruhnama*, containing his poems. Casual statements by Niyazov – such as his reported dislike for the opera, lip synching during concerts, the wearing of beards and long hair by young men and of makeup by newscasters, and gold teeth – were haphazardly interpreted as law by officials anxious to ingratiate themselves with their leader.[397] The foreign press often regarded such steps with amusement. However, the Niyazov personality cult was only the most visible manifestation of a stark fact: absolute power rested in his hands. He was simultaneously president and chairman of the Council of Ministers. His Democratic Party of Turkmenistan was the only political party allowed, and all elected delegates to the two legislative bodies – the Halk Maslahaty, of which he was the head, and the Mejlis – belonged to it. Niyazov was well known for appointing and removing officials at all levels of government at a dizzying rate, with some remaining in office only a few months before being sacked – and in some cases sentenced to internal exile or lengthy prison terms for alleged

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395 David Garcia, *Le pays ou Bouygues est roi* (Paris, 2006), p.159.

396 January became "Turkmenbashi", April became "Gurbansoltan" (the name of Niyazov's mother), October "Garaşsyzlyk" (Independence), and December Bitaraplyk (Neutralit).

397 The Niyazov cult, for all its excesses, has analogues elsewhere in the former Soviet Union's successor states, where images of the leader and his words grace the landscape. This is certainly true in Central Asia. President Nursultan Nazarbayev's image is ubiquitous in Kazakhstan, and students and faculty alike in Uzbekistan's universities are required to pass examinations on the works of President Islom Karimov. Images and sayings of Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmonov are rare in Dushanbe but increasingly common elsewhere. Even in relatively liberal Kyrgyzstan, signs bearing quotes from President Kurmanbek Bakiyev have begun to appear on roadsides, an uncomfortable echo of the days when the words of ousted President Askar Akayev – and, increasingly, his wife Mayram – were a common sight.

wrongdoings. His regular purges of the government, to which some of his closest supposed allies fell prey, kept many guessing as to who could possibly succeed him, even as he announced the possibility of presidential elections for 2009.[398]

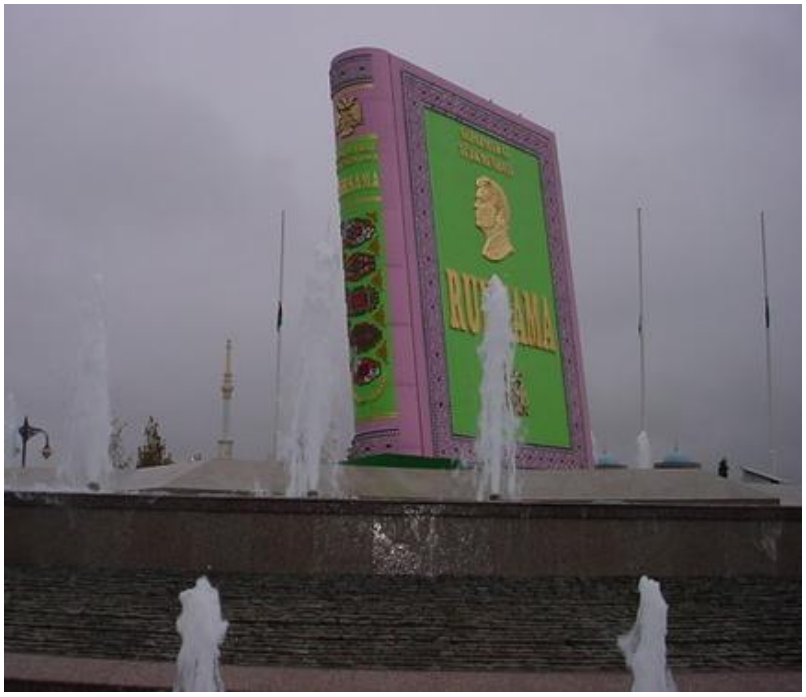

Fig 14: (Ruhnama,)
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruhnama

Religious Milieu

The Turkic people in Turkmenistan are primarily Sunni Muslims. The current Muslim religious leader of Turkmenistan, headquartered in Chardzhou, is the Kazi-Imam Nasrulla Ibadullayev. Although the former Soviet government promoted atheism as an official policy, and indeed attempted to destroy most religious practices, a religious revival has been underway since 1986, when the Soviet attitude toward Islam was relaxed. One consequence has been the increase of mosque construction. While there were only 4 officially recognized mosques in Turkmenistan in 1985, by June 1990, about 70 congregations

[398] In a mid-2005 purge, two officials long seen as among Niyazov's closest allies (Oil, Gas, and Mineral Resources Minister Yolly Gurbanmuradov, and presidential administration head Rejep Saparov) were sacked and sentenced to twenty and 25 years in prison respectively for alleged crimes including graft, abuse of office, and treason. Gurbanbibi Atajanova, the ferociously loyal prosecutor general who had overseen all major political trials for nine years, including those of Gurbanmuradov and Saparov, resigned in April 2006, citing poor health, and was arrested almost immediately thereafter. That same month she publicly confessed to taking bribes and stealing state property and was sentenced to twenty years in prison.

which had been operating underground or informally registered with the authorities as official Muslim congregations. These statistics only apply to mosques officially recognized by the government of Turkmenistan. Due to the decades-long ban on religious freedom, a number of `unofficial' mosques continue to exist; while their exact numbers are unknown, it is believed that they number in the hundreds. There are also a number of noted religious shrines in Turkmenistan, often cantered in Muslim graveyards or near tombs of prominent Muslims of the medieval period.[399] The current government oversees "official Islam" through a structure inherited from the Soviet period. Turkmenistan's Muslim Religious Board, together with that of Uzbekistan, constitutes the Muslim Religious Board of Mavarannahr. The Mavarannahr board is based in Tashkent and exerts considerable influence in appointments of religious leaders in Turkmenistan. The governing body of Islamic judges (Kaziat) is registered with the Turkmenistan Ministry of Justice, and a council of religious affairs under the Cabinet of Ministers monitors the activities of clergy. Individuals who wish to become members of the official clergy must attend official religious institutions; a few, however, may prove their qualifications simply by taking an examination. Some Turkmen do not regularly attend mosque services or demonstrate their adherence publicly, except through participation in officially sanctioned national traditions associated with Islam on a popular level, including life-cycle events such as weddings, burials, and pilgrimages. However, since 1990, efforts have been made to regain some of the cultural heritage lost under Soviet rule. President Saparmurat Niyazov has ordered that basic Islamic principles be taught in public schools. More religious institutions, including religious schools and mosques, have appeared, many with the support of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Turkey. Religious classes are held in both schools and mosques, with instruction in Arabic language, the Quran, the hadith, and the history of Islam, but Turkmenistan's government stresses its secular nature and its support of

[399] Nissman, David, "Iran and Soviet Islam", *Central Asian Survey* (Oxford: Society for Central Asian Studies, December 1983), pp.45-60.

freedom of religious belief, as embodied in the 1991 Law on Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Organizations in the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic and institutionalized in the 1992 constitution. That document guarantees the separation of mosque and state; it also removes any legal basis for Islam to play a role in political life by prohibiting proselytizing, the dissemination of 'unofficial' religious literature, discrimination based on religion, and the formation of religious political parties. In addition, the government reserves the right to appoint and dismiss anyone who teaches religious matters or who is a member of the clergy. Since independence, the Islamic leadership in Turkmenistan has been more assertive, but in large part, it still responds to government control. The official governing body of religious judges gave its official support to President Niyazov in the June 1992 elections. On the other hand, some Muslim leaders are opposed to the secular concept of government and especially to a government controlled by former communists. Some official leaders and teachers working outside the official structure have vowed to increase the population's knowledge of Islam, increase Islam's role in society, and broaden adherence to its tenets. Alarmed that such activism may alienate Orthodox Slavs, the government has drawn up plans to elevate the council of religious affairs to ministry status in an effort to regulate religious activities more tightly.[400] It is the result that Turkmenistan has so far intriguingly remained unaffected by Islamic extremism spreading across the region. There have, of course, been several reports on the suppression of religious ideas and human rights by the autocratic government of President Niyazov. Arbitrary arrests, detentions and tortures in the prisons along with restrictions on freedom of movement through the draconian exit visa system have been reported extensively. These human rights violations have increased dramatically since 25 Nov, 2002, assassination attempt on President Niyazov. A large number of arrests especially of political opponents were reported after

[400] Larry Clark, Michael Thurman, and David Tyson. "Turkmenistan". *A Country Study: Turkmenistan* (Glenn E. Curtis, editor). (March 1996).

the alleged assassination attempt.[401] Such autocratic regimes are the rule rather than an exception in Central Asia. Turkmenistan's autocratic regime probably differs only in degrees from the repressive and centralised state systems under Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan, Emomali Rakhmonov in Tajikistan, Askar Akayev in Kyrgyzstan and Nursultan Abish-uly Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan. All of them are former members of the Soviet Communist Party and took over the leadership of their respective countries after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Their regimes are intolerant of political dissent, have resorted to harsh and repressive measures to control ethnic and religious voices for more public space and exercise complete control over the media. However, such repressive policies have failed to prevent the inroads made by religious extremism in the other Central Asian States.[402] The inability of the religious extremists to spread their activities to Turkmenistan so far cannot be attributed to its repressive policies alone. Niyazov has a natural aversion to religious fanaticism that would threaten his own political survival, but it is important to understand that he is not the sole arbiter of the secular ethos in Turkmenistan. In a region where the democratic state system remains elusive and radical religious ideas are gaining ground, Turkmenistan's religious and social systems have preserved the age old tribal and ethnic loyalties in a largely Muslim dominated country that has in turn effectively diluted the impact of radical Islam. The Turkmen identify more with their culture than with religion or nationality.[403] The land between the Caspian sea and the Amu Darya, traditionally inhabited by the horse-breeding nomadic Turkmen tribes, has had a long history of being conquered by the Greeks, Romans, Seljuks and Turks and finally by the Tsarist regime of Russia. The proud Turkmen people struggled against their aggressors and managed to retain their pride through their strong cultural ethos and ethnic identities. The different Turkmen tribes are known to have lived in harmony through the ages. While the state strictly adheres to secularisation of public

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401 Turkmenistan: The Making of a Failed State Report by the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) April 2004, http://groups.yahoo.com/group/RMSMC/message/3484

402 Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport, Conn., 2001).

403 Bayram Balci, "Fethullah Gulen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam", *Religion, State and Society*, vol. 31, no. 2. 2003.

spaces and enforces it by limiting activities of non-registered religious congregations, by prohibiting them from gathering publicly and proselytizing and disseminating religious material, the centuries old tribal loyalties have also softened the impact of religion in Turkmenistan. Even the most urbane Turkmen has a tribal allegiance and tribalism is visible in their dialects, styles of clothing, eating habits etc. Clan based loyalties in Turkmenistan do not come together with the Westphalian notion of a nation state. The plurality of the Turkmen way of life is also visible in its dominant religion. Islam in Turkmenistan did not arrive as a monolithic entity imported from the Arabian Peninsula through militarised and forced conversions. The Sufi saints from the 10th century onwards travelled everywhere into the heartland of Eurasia and incorporated the Islamic teachings into the tribal belief systems of the nomadic Turkmen tribes.[404] These saints were later adopted as the patron saints of particular clans or tribal groups thereby becoming their founders. The teachings of Sufi 'Sheikhs' or saints are accorded more importance in religious beliefs in Turkmenistan than the mosques and the high, written Quranic tradition.[405] Thus Islam has a much localised identity. This is also visible in its national symbol which depicts the synthesis between Islamic and tribal identities. The national symbol is a horse with five carpet patterns representing the five main tribes of Turkmenistan. This pattern is headed by an Islamic crescent and 5 stars representing the five 'velayats' or provinces of the country.[406] Finally, in a country where 'religion is not the state but the state is religion', there is more to its politics, society and religion, than the 35 feet high golden statue of Turkmenbashi, positioned on the arch of neutrality, rotating around the sun, and his eccentric laws against growing beards and hair.

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[404] F Kazemzadeh, *Testimony on the State of Democratization and Human Rights in Turkmenistan,* presented before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 21 March 2000.
[405] Ludmila Polonskaya-Alexei Malashenko, *Islam in Central Asia*, Lebanon, Garnet Publications, 1994, p.11.
[406] Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, 1994, p.43.

Separation of Politics and Religion

The independent government has declared a secular society, with separation of mosque and state. During the Soviet period, official Muslim affairs were administered by the Spiritual Administration for Muslims of Central Asia in Tashkent. At that time, the Spiritual Administration appointed a Qazi to supervise Islam in each republic. In Turkmenistan, the Qaziate is located in Chardzhou. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Muslim spiritual administrations collapsed also. On June 1, 1992, the Qazi Hajji Nasrullah ibn Ibadulla officially registered the Qaziate of Turkmenistan with the Turkmen Ministry of Justice. The condition under which it was registered was that Ministry of Justice officials maintain a working relationship with the religious representatives."[407] According to Article 6 of Turkmenistan's Constitution, religious practices are free, but private religious instruction is forbidden.[408] There are also other conditions placed on the practice of religion. Under Article 3, which guarantees freedom of conscience, it is stated, "exercising the freedom to profess a religion or other convictions is subject only to those restrictions which are necessary to safeguard public safety and order, life and health of the people, and morale."[409] The vagueness of the wording permits the government enormous latitude in interpreting the concepts of public safety and order, morale, etc. The Turkmenistan Government Council for Religious Affairs is the final arbiter of religious activity in Turkmenistan. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, various forms of missionary activity began to be conducted. In line with the prevention of the uses of religions for the purpose of anti-state and anti constitutional propaganda, spelled out in Turkmenistan's law on "Freedom of Worship and Religious Organizations," a member of the Council for Religious Affairs has noted, "missionary activity is, in fact, illegal."[410] This limitation applies to both Muslim and non-Muslim religious activity.

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[407] Ochs, op. cit., p.317.
[408] Turkmeninform, "Kaziate Registered", *Turkmenistan* (Ashgabat: 3 June 1992), p.3.
[409] Helsinki Watch, *Human Rights in Turkmenistan* (New York: Helsinki Watch, July 1993), p.2.
[410] Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Turkmenistan", *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), pp.182-183.

Society of Turkmenistan

Independent Turkmenistan under the rule of Saparmurat Turkmenbashi was a rigidly closed society whose interaction with the outside world was strictly controlled by any possible means restricting the flow of information and people both inwards and outwards. All institutions and facilities of mass media were financed by the state and their content was shaped in accordance with official discourse and government policies. Internet access was severely limited, and when it was accessible, the flow of content was closely monitored by the state. Means of private communication, such as telephone calls and fax transmissions, were also under record. Foreigners, were hardly admitted visa upon invitation letters from Turkmen citizens or institutions, were regarded as potential agents of both espionage and missionaries and therefore received a particular KNB attention. In addition to the tight visa regime, which Turkmen government employed for the foreigners, it was equally difficult for a Turkmen citizen to receive an exit visa, which had to be issued upon a cabinet decision.[411] Reinforced by Soviet-fashioned policies and institutions, the extent of isolationism and government control makes it very difficult to assess the real extent of Turkmenbashi's authoritarianism and its effects upon the country. However, the apparent face of policies carried out by Turkmenbashi and their outcomes were striking enough to give an idea about arbitrariness of his rule at the expense of social and economic development of his people. The authoritarian regime of Saparmurat Turkmenbashi was generously financed by the oil and natural gas revenues of the country, which possesses the fourth biggest natural gas reserves in the world after Russia, the United States and Canada.[412] Although exports of oil and gas did not bring back tangible benefits during the Soviet rule, they made Turkmenistan, together with Russia, a net donor of transfers among the union republics and therefore let the successor Turkmen state leave the union as the only ex-Soviet republic that did not have

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411 *Religious Affairs Council on Current Tasks* (Ashgabat: Turkmenskaya Iskra, 31 March 92, p.2) as reported in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report: Central Eurasia*, 29 April 1992, p.86.

412 Brown, Bess, "Governance in Central Asia: The case of Turkmenistan", *Helsinki Monitor*, 14/3 (2003), p.214.

any debt to Russia.[413] After the independence, energy sector continued to dominate the overall economic production of independent Turkmenistan, while state preserved the monopoly on both the ownership and revenues of gas and oil resources. Accordingly, Turkmenbashi's regime was able to provide public services including almost-free supply of water and energy without demanding taxes from the citizens, besides engaging in many other populist investments such as reconstructing the capital in marble and gold together with magnificent public facilities including an ice-skating palace, olympic swimming facilities, and a Disneyland. Furthermore, rich oil and gas deposits also favoured Turkmenbashi respectful treatment from foreign governments in spite of the notorious human-rights crimes of his regime, and thus enhanced his hand to advance his authoritarian policies even more.[414] Despite the wealth acquired through oil and gas revenues, most of the population remained in poverty. Although the official statements recognized only 1% of the population as living in poverty, according to the World Bank 44% of the population had to maintain their livelihoods with earnings less than $2 per day.[415] The agricultural sector, which was the major provider of employment opportunities together with the public services sector, remained heavily controlled through a centralized structure which dictated cultivation of cotton and wheat crops to meet particular quotas while providing inputs and subsidies for this end. However, the requirement to sell the harvest in officially set prices left the farmers with annual incomes of around $100. Overall unemployment was estimated at over 70% and aggravated by public-sector layoffs.[416] Even more exacerbating the

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413 Kuru, Ahmet, "The rentier state model and Central Asian studies: The Turkmen case", *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 7/1 (2008): p.63.

414 Bushev, Aleksandr, "A kind of prosperity", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists,* 50/1 (1994), p.46; Orlowski, Lucjan, "Indirect transfers in trade among former Soviet Union Republics: Sources, patterns and policy responses in the Post-Soviet period", *Europe-Asia Studies,* 45/6 (1993), p.1005.

415 Menon, op. cit., pp.176-80; Mehdiyoun, Kamyar, "Ownership of oil and gas resources in the Caspian Sea", *The American Journal of International Law*, 94/1(2000): pp.179-189; Andrews- Speed, Philip and Sergei Vinogradov, "China's involvement in Central Asian petroleum: Convergent or divergent interests?", *Asian Survey*, 40/2 (2000): pp.377-397; Tang, Shiping, "Economic integration in Central Asia: The Russian and Chinese relationship", *Asian Survey,* 40/2 (2000): pp.360-376; Singh, Anita Inder, "India's relations with Russia and Central Asia", *International Affairs,* 71/1 (1995): pp.69-81; Warkotsch, Alexander, "International socialization in difficult environments: The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Central Asia", *Democratization*, 14/3 (2007): pp.491-508.

416 Olcott, Martha Brill, *Central Asia's Second Chance,* Washington, D.C., Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005, p.105.

situation, in 2006, Turkmenbashi considered pension allowances, which were often below $20 per month, to be excessive and suspended all pension payments until they were recalculated according to new rules. According to the ministry for Social Welfare Provision, the new regulations would result in a cut down in pensions of 200,000 people while it would totally deprive 100,000 people of their pension rights by declaring them ineligible.[417] Moreover, in Turkmenbashi's Turkmenistan, most of the population did not have access to proper health services while the public education system of the country collapsed. Policies carried out by Turkmenbashi regime regarding these two vital public services was rather destructive of what had been inherited from the Soviet era instead of aiming at their modernization and improvement. Public health policies of Turkmenbashi were mainly focused on restricting both availability and the quality of the overall medical services with an excuse of funding scarcities. In 1997, he ordered the closure of rural hospitals and suggested the rural people to go to the capital city for treatment.[418] He argued that this policy would provide them a better care in the capital through redirecting all the funds to the centre to establish strengthened medical facilities. Following his orders, most hospitals outside the capital were closed and few remaining ones were suffering from lack of staff, equipment, and medicines. Thousands of rural people lost their lives due to treatable illnesses such as tuberculosis; however, it led to no tangible improvement of health services. In contrast, Turkmenbashi announced further health reforms in 2006, including dismissal of an estimated 15,000 healthcare workers and employing military conscripts in their place.[419] Remaining health services were made even more inaccessible by adding new charges.[420]

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417 "Inside the mad despot's realm", *Economist*, 379/8479 (2006): pp.39-40.
418 Dadabaev, op. cit., pp.136-137.
419 Ibid.
420 Denber, Rachel, op. cit., p.14.

Education

Education system of the country was equally malfunctioning. For Turkmenbashi, the primary function of public education was political indoctrination. Intellectual development of individuals was regarded of lesser importance, if not openly declared undesirable for the regime. Accordingly, basic education was reduced to nine years. In the autumns, students were frequently employed in the cotton fields for harvesting [421] and a great proportion of schooling time was devoted to getting prepared for ceremonies to celebrate national days and official events, which were abundant. Finally, the remaining lecture hours had to be divided between learning passages from *Ruhnama*, the semi-religious book written by Saparmurat Turkmenbashi himself, and the rest of the curriculum. As a result, the basic education received by the new generation, which constituted almost half of the population, was far below being adequate to enable development of a sufficient level of general knowledge and critical thinking.[422] The higher education system similarly collapsed. The duration of graduate programs was reduced from four years to two years, and enrolment was cut down to a tenth of the pre-independence figure.[423] Standards of education were so poor that diplomas were unacceptable abroad. In order to prevent Turkmen students being influenced by foreign ideas, their possibilities to study abroad were remarkably reduced as well, and, upon Turkmenbashi's orders, foreign degrees were not recognized within the borders of Turkmenistan.[424]

Meanwhile, the arbitrary and despotic policies of Turkmenbashi were infiltrating almost any dimension of the social life. After he had to quit smoking because of his health problems in 1997, he ordered prohibition of smoking in all public places.[425] A decree issued in February 2004 banned young men from having long hair or beard. Some other interventions in social

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421 "Inside the mad despot's realm", *Economist*: pp.39-40.
422 "Brain dead", *Economist,* 372/8385 (2004): p.42.
423 Sabol, Steven, "Turkmenbashi", *Problems of Post-Communism,* 50/5 (2003): pp. 48-57.
424 "Inside the mad despot's realm", *Economist*: pp.39-40.
425 Brown, Bess, op. cit., p.211-212.

life were the ban of opera, ballet and circus which was supposed to be incompatible with Turkmen culture, and listening to the radio while driving.[426] Most of the time, these political decisions were simply random without following a certain logical framework or sequence. Even more concerning was the restrictions upon basic rights and freedoms. Turkmenbashi's regime was declared as "one of the most repressive and abusive governments in the world" in records of many human rights organizations.[427] The basic rights recognized by the constitution were never put into practice. Ethnic and religious minorities were under a harsher pressure, while every Turkmen citizen was closely watched by KNB. Movement of the citizens within the country was strictly limited to reinforce KNB control over the people. Internal visas were required particularly when travelling to border regions, though movement of the citizens were traced and controlled by countrywide checkpoints located at the exit and entrance points of all towns and cities. Working and living in a city different form the registered residence, which was based on the birthplace and occasionally allowed to be changed, was discouraged and bound to special permission. Although Turkmenbashi succeeded in maintaining his rule through enhanced means and policies of suppression and oppression, regime's legitimacy remained quite low and was further diminished in respect to serious social and economic problems persisting over years. Like many other rentier systems, Turkmenbashi sought to make up for the deficiencies through enhancing his investments in populist projects and public campaigns.[428]

Health Care Sector

Health care is likewise on the verge of a grave crisis.[429] Like the education sector, it has been stripped of much of its funding; a December 2004 decree in effect privatized the system, requiring that local hospitals and clinics fund

[426] Dadabaev, op. cit., p.136.
[427] Rhodes, Aaron and Paula Tscherne-Lempiäinen, "Human rights and terrorism in the Central Asian OSCE states", *Helsinki Monitor,* 13/1 (2002): pp.36-51.
[428] Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2003,* New York, HRW, 2003, pp.371-376; Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

[429] Kuru, op. cit., p.54.

themselves. At the same time, Niyazov spent millions to ensure his own access to the latest medical treatments; it is not clear whether he paid for this out of his own pockets or from state coffers. The results of the privatization decision have been catastrophic. Patients now have to pay half the costs at the point of delivery (with the other 50% from medical insurance). Rural clinics have been downgraded and now have only one trained doctor – if any. District hospitals have been shut, so patients must travel to regional hospitals. Even there are number of specialist services, which have been withdrawn and are now only available in Ashgabat.[430] In stark contrast to these massive spending cuts, the new ministry of health building in the capital is a futuristic $12 million creation, though it has been characterized as merely a 'facade'.[431] The deformed 'free-market' health-care system also gives specialist doctors an interest in prescribing expensive procedures from which they make substantial profits. At the same time, the wages of anesthetists, nurses and general surgeons have fallen.[432] Corruption has led to reduce vaccination rates, since funds meant to procure supplies are often diverted.[433] It is extremely difficult to get accurate information about the state of health care due to the government's refusal even to admit that there are a number of serious diseases in the country. The Turkmen Helsinki Fund reported the suppression of information about cases of aids, typhoid, plague, tuberculosis, anthrax and cholera. Doctors are ordered to diagnose such diseases as minor ailments.[434] The approach is potentially catastrophic one in an area of the world where rates of HIV/AIDS infection and tuberculosis (including multiple drug resistant forms) are growing rapidly. A recent ministry of health decree ordered the compulsory redundancy of all doctors over pensionable age. Pension cuts mean they will receive very

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430 Bernd Rachel and Martin McKee, "Human rights and health in Turkmenistan", policy brief, 2005, www.lshtm.ac.uk/ecohost/prjects/health-turkmen.htm.
431 "Reform of the health care system", TIHR, 19 April 2006, at www.eurasianet.org/turkmenistan.project/files2/ 060419healthcaresystem(eng).doc.
432 V. Volkov, O. Sariev, "Siluet kobry. Turkmenskoe zdravokhranenie umiraet" [The silhouette of the cobra. Turkmen health care is dying], Deutsche Welle, www.centrasia.ru
433 "Turkmen patients pay for privatisation", IWPR, 26 April 2005, www.iwpr.net
434 V. Volkov, O. Sariev, "Turkmeniia: vaktsinatsiia bez vaktsin" [Turkmenistan: vaccinations without vaccines], Deutsche Welle, 1 November 2005.

few benefits.[435] Many Turkmen leave the country for treatment in neighbouring Uzbekistan.[436] Some doctors who have lost their jobs have gone there or as far away as Russia.[437]

Human Rights

The human rights record under Niyazov was one of the most abysmal in the world. Freedom of movement of citizens was severely restricted, both inside and outside the country, with thousands on an official blacklist that denied the right to travel abroad.[438] Religious freedom was severely restricted.[439] Ethnic minorities (mostly Russians and Uzbeks, but also including smaller numbers of Kazakhs, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Iranians, and Baluchis) were in effect subjected to forced Turkmenification, denied native language education and required to dress in Turkmen national dress and observe Turkmen customs.[440] Access to information was tightly limited; no independent media was permitted, and the internet was available only through a single government provider and closely monitored. Property rights were regularly violated; entire residential neighbourhoods of Ashgabat and other cities were routinely destroyed to make way for Niyazov's massive construction projects, often with little or no warning or compensation for those displaced.[441] Prisoners of

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435 "Sanitarno-epidemiologicheskaia situatsiia v Turkmenistane vyzyvaet trevogu" [The sanitary and epidemiological situation in Turkmenistan raises alarm], Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation, 13 February 2006, www.tmhelsinki.org

436 "Sokrashchenie meditsinskikh rabotnikov…za schet pensionerov" [A reduction in medical workers… at pensioners' expense], Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation, 15 May 2006, www.tmhelsinki.org

437 Kamron Kambarov, "To Uzbekistan, for Care", Eurasianet 6 October 2005, www.eurasianet.org

438 Sian Glaessner, "Grim reality of Turkmen health care", BBC, 16 November 2005, news.bbc.co.uk.

439 Large parts of Turkmenistan – according to one estimate, as much as 50 per cent – are off limits even to citizens. The right of citizens to change their legal place of residence is severely restricted, Crisis Group interview, November 2006. In 2005, a new law imposed severe restrictions on entering or exiting the country; "New law restricts exit from the country", TIHR, 6 Nov 2010, http://www.chrono-tm.org/?025704226900000000000000011000000. As of late 2006, over 10,000 people are thought to have been included on a list of those denied the right to exit, including relatives of disgraced former government officials and current and former journalists and activists, as well as many for whom there is no readily discernible reason. "It's possible to get onto the list by mistake, but virtually impossible to get off", a human rights activist said, Crisis Group interview, November 2006.

440 The majority Sunni Muslim community and the Russian Orthodox minority are allowed to practice their religions under tight state control. Others, such as Shi'ia Islam, Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism and Armenian Apostolism, have not been allowed to open places of worship. Followers of some "non-traditional" beliefs, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Hare Krishnas, were eventually able to win official permission to practice their faith, but are still subject to frequent harassment, including imprisonment. Reports by the Norwegian NGO Forum 18, at www.forum18.org

441 This was especially the case for non-Russian ethnic minorities. For more information, see the August 2005 alternative report by the International League for Human Rights (ILHR) on Turkmenistan's

conscience swell the prison population, and were often held in remote, isolated jails with no hope of family contact.[442] Forced confinement in psychiatric institutions for regime opponents, a holdover from Soviet times, was widely employed.[443] Torture and drugging with psychotropic substances were common means of extracting confessions from suspects.[444] A wave of repression following an apparent coup attempt in November 2002[445] moved the OSCE to invoke its rarely-used 'Moscow Mechanism', which allows creation of an adhoc commission of independent experts to investigate human security issues in a member state. Professor Emmanuel Decaux, reporter for the OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, produced a 53-page report but was not allowed to visit Turkmenistan to complete his work.[446] Moreover; the case of three journalists and human rights activists – Annakurban Amankylychev, Sapardurdy Hajiyev and Ogulsapar Muradova – has attracted particular attention in the West. Their arrests in June 2006 came as Niyazov announced he had uncovered a vast spy ring, including the OSCE

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compliance with the United Nations Convention to End All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), available online at http://www.ilhr.org/ilhr/regional/centasia/reports/Report%20Turkm%202005.pdf

[442] Crisis Group Reports on Turkmenistan, op. cit. Recently, large-scale demolitions have taken place in Turkmenbashy, supposedly initiated by Niyazov in response to complaints from foreign residents that there were too few places of entertainment. Particularly hard hit was the old town, in which a number of historic buildings were destroyed, Crisis Group interview, November 2006.

[443] The prison population is not published but the country is believed to have the highest imprisonment rate in Asia and one of the highest in the world, with an estimated 489 prisoners per 100,000 population in 2000, International Centre for Prison Studies, http://www.prisonstudies.org/. There are reports of appalling conditions, including extreme overcrowding. A January 2006 law reduced family visiting rights from four to two per year and the right to receive parcels from six to one per year. Rights groups speculate this is partly to prevent news about conditions from reaching the outside world. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), despite several high-level visits, has not persuaded the authorities to grant it access to work for prisoners and detainees; See "Monitoring maryiskogo dispansera MR/D 14" [A monitoring of the Mary dispenser MR/D-14],Turkmenistan Helsinki Fund (THF), 14 December 2005, and"Novye ogranicheniia, vvedennye v mestakh lisheniia svobody" [New restrictions introduced in places of detention], THF, 16 March 2006; "ICRC vice-president visits Turkmenistan", press release, 29 June 2005, www.icrc.ch

[444] For example, Kakabay Tejenov, 70, a human rights activist, was forcibly confined to psychiatric hospital on 4 January 2006 for sending a telegram to international organisations criticising the government and its human rights record. Another government opponent, Gurbandurdy Durdykuliyev, was placed in a psychiatric institution in February 2004, a month after he sought permission to hold a critical demonstration; he was released on 12 April 2006, in connection, some speculate, to a letter from 54 members of the U.S. Congress to Niyazov calling for this, "Turkmenistan: Eshche odin dissident pomeshchen v psikhiatricheskuiu bol'nitsu" [Turkmenistan: yet another dissident has been placed in a psychiatric hospital], Memorial, 8 February 2006, www.memo.ru; "Turkmenistan: Dissident Released from Psychiatric Hospital", RFE/RL, 12 April 2006, www.rferl.org; "World Report 2006", Human Rights Watch, 18 January 2006, www.hrw.org

[445] Both means were widely used to extract confessions from the alleged ringleaders of a November 2002 coup attempt, "Turkmenistan: The making of a failed state", International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, April 2004, at http://www.tmhelsinki.org/en/modules/wfchannel/index.php? pagenum=7.

[446] Crisis Group Report, *Repression and Regression in Turkmenistan*, op. cit.

and the French embassy in Ashgabat. The three had been assisting a group of French journalists preparing a documentary on Turkmenistan. Muradova, 58, a correspondent for RFE/RL's Turkmen service, was apparently tortured to death in custody in September. Amankylychev and Hajiyev were each sentenced to seven years imprisonment; their current whereabouts and health are unknown.

Economy

The domestic economy is in deep crisis. While government figures have consistently shown a growth in annual GDP of over 20%,[447] the Economist Intelligence Unit estimates the real rate was 6% in 2005 and again in 2006.[448] However, even this primarily represents profits from the export of hydrocarbons. The exact amount of Turkmenistan's hydrocarbon reserves, particularly natural gas, is a closely kept secret, as is the amount of money generated by their export. The Russian giant, Gazprom, which then sells it to Ukraine and Western Europe, purchases virtually all the gas. Proposals to build a pipeline linking Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan received only lukewarm support from Niyazov, who in effect controlled all gas and oil deals himself.[449] Their profits went into the Foreign Exchange Reserve Fund and the Oil and Gas Fund, controlled by Niyazov and senior ministers and used for personal gain and grandiose projects.[450] The isolation of the hydrocarbon sector from the rest of the economy has meant that its revenues have not benefited the people of the country:

- The infant mortality rate of 80 per 1,000 live births is similar to that of Pakistan (80) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (81), despite the fact that Turkmenistan has a per capita income more than twice that of the former and nearly five times that of the latter.[451]

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447 Professor Emmanuel Decaux, "OSCE Rapporteur's Report on Turkmenistan", 12 March 2003.
448 The figure for 2005 was 21 per cent, "Turkmenistan reports rapid economic growth in 2005", Turkmen government website, 18 January 2006, via BBC Monitoring.
449 "Country Report: Turkmenistan", Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), January 2007.
450 "Niyazov was never serious about the trans-Caspian pipeline", a former gas industry executive said. "He had made enough money; he had a good deal with Gazprom, and all he wanted to do was stay rich, stay in power and not antagonise Russia", Crisis Group interview, January 2007.
451 Crisis Group Report, *Cracks in the Marble*, op. cit.; also, "It's a Gas: Funny business in the Turkmen-Ukraine gas trade", Global Witness, April 2006, available online at www.globalwitness.org/reports

- Turkmenistan ranked 105th out of 177 countries on the UN Human Development Index (HDI) in 2006, down from 83 as recently as 2001, when oil and gas revenues were substantially lower.[452]
- GDP per capita peaked in 1988 at $6,585. In 2004, it was $4,584,[453] despite the great increase in oil and gas revenues, indicating that actual earnings of average citizens have declined substantially. While living standards in Ashgabat and other urban centers are good by Central Asian standards, life in rural communities has grown steadily worse. Transparency International rates Turkmenistan as the third most corrupt country in the world.[454] Mass layoffs in the education and healthcare systems and even the energy sector have led to unemployment. Military conscripts are often used as free labour to fill the gaps.[455] Foreign investment has fallen steadily; the EIU estimated a 10 % reduction in 2005. There is an ongoing process of demonetization, particularly in rural areas, where shortages of cash have led to a rise in barter among state enterprises and the public.[456] In February 2006, Niyazov added to the economic misery by cancelling the pensions of 100,000, as well as ending maternity and sick leave payments.[457]

The agricultural sector is likewise in a state of disarray. Though a limited land reform has been in place, by and large farmers can only grow the two most important crops – wheat and cotton – subject to state orders: the state decides how much of each crop shall be planted, by whom, and when, and it is the sole purchaser of the harvest, at a low price. As a consequence of poor planning and a lack of incentives for farmers to produce, crop yields have been devastatingly low in recent years. One example is the wheat harvest of 2005. In July it was reported at 3.1 million tons, a record and easily enough to feed the entire

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452 United Nations Human Development Report 2006.
453 Ibid, 2001.
454 Ibid., There was not large population growth in this period that would create this effect. If Turkmenistan receives much higher prices for its gas in 2007, per capita income may increase substantially, without necessarily meaning that the greater revenues were benefiting average citizens.
455 "Corruption Perceptions Index 2005", available online at transparency.org.
456 "Turkmenistan: Half-Starved Soldiers Prop Up Economy", IWPR, 23 December 2005, www.iwpr.net
457 Economist Intelligence Unit, op. cit., p.17.

population.[458] However, by November, massive shortages and huge price increases were reported for flour all over the country. The discrepancy was widely attributed to officials' fear at admitting they had not met targets.[459] The agricultural crisis continued into 2006, when Niyazov's admission of a poor harvest caused panic buying of flour that drove prices up by a reported 25 %.[460] The major export crop is cotton, though harvest failures, coupled with the growth in gas prices, reduced its share of export earnings for 2005 to an estimated 1%.[461] As in other Central Asian countries, the cotton industry causes widespread political, economic, social and environmental problems.[462] The estimated harvest for 2005 was around 720,000 tons, about a third of the official target.[463] In October 2005, a number of officials were sacked for failing to reach that target.[464] The disastrous 2006 harvest yielded less than half the planned two million tons, and the governors of all five provinces were fired.[465] The government continues to import modern agricultural technology: a $55 million contract was signed with the U.S. Case Corporation on 15 August 2006.[466] However, Turkmen sources note that one reason for the low yields is that expensive foreign harvesting technology generally stands idle, as nobody has the skills to use it. Children were still manually harvesting cotton in the fields for two months of the school year in 2005.[467] Child labour was also used in the 2006 harvest, in violation of a 2005 law banning the practice.[468]

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458 "Turkmen president cancels pensions, cuts welfare benefits", Dow Jones International News, 2 February 2006.
459 "Turkmenistan claims record grain harvest", RFE/RL, 11 July 2005, www.rferl.org
460 Bruce Pannier, "Turkmenistan: what happened to 'record' grain harvest?", RFE/RL, 8 November 2005, www.rferl.org
461 Economist Intelligence Unit, op. cit., p.25.
462 Ibid., p.28.
463 Crisis Group Asia Report N°93, *The Curse of Cotton: Central Asia's Destructive Monoculture*, 28 February 2005.
464 EIU, op. cit., p.26.
465 "Turkmen officials sacked over low cotton production", RFE/RL, 7 October 2004, www.rferl.org
466 EIU, op. cit.,
467 "Turkmenistan buys another batch of agricultural machinery from Case Corporation", 15 August 2006, www.turkmenistan.ru
468 Crisis Group interview, May 2006., Cited in "Turkmenistan after Niyazov" International Crisis Group 12 February, 2007, www.crisisgroup.org

Islam on the Eve of Independence

The Soviet Union disintegrated suddenly, without warning or preparation, at the end of 1991. In Central Asia, Islam was still largely a marker of a cultural identity. The vast majority of the population still had very little knowledge of the doctrines and practices of faith. Yet there was by this time a palpable sense of pride in the region's Muslim heritage and preparedness - almost expectancy - that Islam would assume an increasingly important role in public life. This is indeed what happened in the early years of independence. Since independence, there has been a revival of Islam. The number of mosques has increased from 4 to 398. Still, most Turkmen do not attend mosque services on a regular basis or demonstrate adherence to the faith publicly except in such life passage public events as weddings, funerals and burials. They have long been regarded as practicing a form of "folk Islam" rather than the stricter variant observed in Middle Eastern countries. This determination is based partly on the number of rituals Turkmen perform which do not have their origins in Islam. For example, Shrine or holy site worship remains an important part of daily life despite the fact that veneration of saints (in the place of God) is not permitted according to Islamic teaching. Many Turkmen, particularly residents of rural areas, continue to pray at shrines through appeals to its patron saint.[469] In addition, the concept of the "evil eye" is an important one in Turkmenistan. Due to which bazaars are full of goods marketed to ward off the evil eye. Most accidents, which do not have an obvious cause, are attributed to the powers of the evil eye. As a precaution, Turkmen hang a shrub with spherical twigs over their doorways that are thought to have the power to ward off the effects of this unwelcome spirit.[470]

Post-Soviet Islamization

The collapse of the Soviet Union caused massive social and economic dislocation in the Central Asian states. It also created a psychological vacuum,

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469 EIU, op. cit.
470 Ahmad Rashid, op. cit., p.41.

raising the specter of societal implosion. In an effort to counter this threat, the ruling elites (who had all come to power under the patronage of the Soviet system) moved swiftly to promote Islam as the basis of new "state ideologies". Party officials throughout the region began to distance themselves from Communist doctrine and use Islam as a means of furnishing themselves with an alternative, national source of legitimization. Public opinion was mobilized through articles in the press and the pronouncements of leading public figures that emphasized the need for a return to Islamic ethics. President Saparmurat Niyazov of Turkmenistan, Akayev of Kyrgyzstan and Karimov of Uzbekistan took their respective oaths of office on both the Quran and the Constitution to underline the dual importance of religion and law in society. The following year President Niyazov proposed that the new Turkmen Constitution should reflect the moral values of Islam. In Uzbekistan, in the immediate aftermath of independence, President Karimov reputedly went so far as to promise to establish an Islamic state. Over the next few years, all the Presidents of the Central Asian states performed the pilgrimage to Mecca. There was a new sensitivity (at least in public) regarding the observance of dietary prohibitions; Islamic gestures (e.g. the downward stroking of the face) and pious utterances, once confined to the private sphere, became a regular feature of public discourse. During Ramadan, it became acceptable to admit to keep the fast.

In all the Central Asian states, the separation of mosque and state was enshrined in the new, post-Soviet constitutions. Yet the promotion of Islam by some of the presidents intensified to the point where it began to threaten this principle. Thus, for example, as early as 1994, a Turkmen academic commented, "Islam in Turkmenistan will be what the president wants it to be."[471] In the other states, too, there were indications of a blurring of the boundaries between secular and religious authorities. In all the Central Asian states, the form of Islam that is propagated by the government sponsored religious bodies is orthodox Sunni Islam of the Hanafi School of jurisprudence.

[471] The Khiva Interactive Guidebook. "The Evil Eye", http://www.khiva.info/gb/customs/evileye.htm

However, the sphere of application is strictly limited. The introduction of *sharia* law (Muslim canon law) into the legal framework of these states is not under consideration. The main concern of the government is to promote "good" Islam, regarded as beneficial to the development of the state; and to eliminate "bad" Islam. "Bad" Islam, it is emphasized is to blame for the conflicts in Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Yet, there is no public debate in any of the Central Asian countries as to the criteria that determine "good" and "bad" Islam. Thus, the dividing line tends to be drawn arbitrarily. For example, men who grow beards (a traditional Muslim sign of piety) and women who wear Islamic-style dress are regarded with suspicion, particularly in Uzbekistan and same is the case with Turkmenistan, where women wearing headscarves and men with beards were banned from state universities in 1997.[472] Yet the making of pious gestures in public (such as the downward stroking of the face) is considered acceptable. Most people seem prepared to accept these anomalies without question (or at least without openly voicing reservations). This may be out of fear, but it is noteworthy that even educated Turkmen Muslims show an almost total absence of curiosity regarding modern debates on Islam. There is still a striking lack of intellectual engagement with Islam. There are no Turkmen Muslim thinkers expounding a coherent vision of Islam. Equally, there is virtually no awareness of the existence of contemporary thought in other parts of the Islamic world. The writings of Mohammed Arkoun, Rashid al-Ghangohi, Taha Husayn, Imam Khomeini, Abul A'la Maududi, Sayyid Qutb, Fazlur Rahman, Zia Sardar and Ali Shariati, to mention but a handful, are almost entirely unknown.

Re-Creating an Islamic Infrastructure

In the immediate aftermath of independence, the re-instatement of mosques, centers of worship and community life became a priority. In Turkmenistan, for example, there were only four mosques open for worship in the 1980s; by 1994

[472] Karimov, I. *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century*, London: Curzon, 1997, pp.85-94

there were 181 and 100 more were at the planning stage.[473] Schools and voluntary bodies began to teach the Arabic script and give instruction in reading the Quran. The numerous Madrasas and Islamic centers that began to appear throughout the region provided opportunities for more advanced Muslim education. Particular attention was paid to the provision of training for girls. Madrasa courses for women were opened in many places. "Leagues of Muslim Women" were established in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (though most disintegrated within a few months) but not in Turkmenistan. The physical proximity of places of worship encouraged people to attend services on a regular basis, and in the early 1990s mosque congregations grew rapidly. However, by 1994, the novelty had begun to fade, and a marked drop in attendance was observed throughout the region. Moreover, Madrasa entrants were not always motivated by a desire to pursue religious studies; some were more interested in benefiting from the free tuition in Arabic and other languages in order to improve their prospects in business. Nevertheless, there has been a gradual but distinct rise in numbers of those who profess a genuine devotion to Islam. Some researchers believe that this trend is to be found mainly in villages, among males in the 17 to 25 year old age group. Others insist that it is more typical of the emerging entrepreneurial class and of university students. The institutional control of Islamic activities in Central Asia today largely follows the Soviet model. The chief difference is that separate national administrations (Muftiats) have now replaced the Soviet-era unified administration (i.e. the former Muslim Board of Central Asia and Kazakhstan). The work of these Muftiats is closely monitored by a Committee or Council for Religious Affairs, a body that serves as the interface between the government and the religious communities - another Soviet-era survival. Nevertheless, in Turkmenistan, the Muftiat and the Committee have virtually merged into a single entity, as the Chairman of the latter body is the Deputy Mufti, while the Mufti is Deputy Chairman of the Committee. The interests of Muslims as well as adherents of other established faiths - chiefly Orthodox

[473] Frantz, D. Persecution Charged in ex-Soviet Republic, *New York Times*, 29 October 2000, p.6

Christianity and Judaism - are officially represented in these Committees/Councils. The 'non-traditional' faiths such as Bahais, Pentecostals and Jehovahs Witnesses are regarded with suspicion and given little opportunity for official representation. Laws regulating freedom of conscience obligations and responsibilities of religious organizations have been passed in all the Central Asian states. Political parties of a religious orientation are proscribed everywhere except in Tajikistan, where the IRF, outlawed in 1993, was in mid-1999 legalized again in the run-up to parliamentary elections. The new national Muslim administrations are responsible for the formal examination and registration of the ulma. Unregistered preachers are liable to criminal prosecution. The ostensible aim of registration is to disbar unqualified individuals from holding religious posts. At the same time, registration enables the state authorities to keep a close check on the ideological orientation of the religious establishment. Clerics, who hold views that do not conform to the official line, or who are felt to be lacking in loyalty to the government, can be excluded from the system or exiled from the country.

Muslim Missionaries

The main external influence on Central Asian Islam in recent years has been that of visiting missionaries. In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, they arrived from many parts of the Muslim world to preach and to open schools. At first, they were welcomed, but gradually resentment and suspicion set in. Ordinary believers objected to attempts to replace local customs by more orthodox procedures (in Kyrgyzstan, for example, foreign missionaries were shocked by the traditional funeral rites, which they regarded as pagan rather than Islamic). The state authorities were equally displeased by the introduction of alien ideas and practices. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were the first to impose restrictions on Muslim missionaries from abroad. Similar concerns emerged in the other states and throughout Central Asia, the activities of foreign Muslims are now carefully monitored. Foreign commentators initially expected that Iran would play the leading role in the re-Islamization of Central

Asia. In fact, Iranian clerics have been conspicuous largely by their absence. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, delegations from Iran began to visit the Central Asian states and to acquire firsthand familiarity with the region. They soon realized that an Islamic revolution along the lines of the Iranian model was not a realistic prospect. This was partly because of very low level of knowledge of Islam among the population at large, but more especially because of the lack of a trained, independent-minded ulma. The fact that the Iranians represent the Shia tradition also placed them at a disadvantage. By contrast, Sunni Muslim missionaries were active from the first years of independence. Turkish missionaries have played a special role in Central Asia. According to Kyrgyz official statistics, for example, there were 55 Turkish Muslim missionaries in the country in 1999; missionaries from Pakistan, the second largest group, numbered less than 40.[474] The great majority of the Turkish missionaries were Nurcus, followers of Said Nursi and of his disciple Fethulla Gulen. The Nurcus opened many schools and commercial enterprises in the Central Asian states. Their teaching programmes concentrated on scientific subjects, technical skills, and they appeared to be advocating a moderate, modernized form of Islam. However, their extra-curricular activities conveyed a more radical message. There were increasing concerns that their ultimate political project was the creation of an Islamic state. The Turkmen authorities have since claimed that some of the Central Asian students who studied in Turkey received 'terrorist training'. The Turkish missionaries are also accused of having a pan-Turkic agenda. As a result of such suspicions, their newspaper *Zaman* (Time) was banned; several Turkish teachers were expelled at around the same time. In other Central Asian states, a similar sense of unease is emerging concerning the activities of this group; their work is now being more closely monitored, especially in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

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474 Trofimov, D. Friday Mosques and the Imams in the Former Soviet Union, *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 24, Nos. 2/3, September 1996, pp.193-219

Revival of Islam

In much of Central Asia, the broad process of re-Islamization that took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s was accompanied by the emergence of political movements that espoused a greater adherence to Islamic tenets. In Turkmenistan, however, there has been no movement to introduce elements of *Sharia* or to establish parties based on Islamic principles. The vast majority of the population prefers to disassociate religion from politics altogether, and would be unlikely to lend any support to replace secular rule with religious rule, especially if it were to involve a political struggle. Perhaps more than any other factor, the desire to perpetuate religious beliefs and practices that are widely regarded as 'national' traditions in Turkmenistan has disempowered Islamism—an ideology calling for change—as a potent force for social mobilization. Turkmens generally view Islam as a crucial part of national culture, encompassing a set of local customs that sets them apart from outsiders. As such, Islam has a significant secular component that has made it relatively immune to politicization and the penetration of Islamist ideologies. 'Folk' Islam (*Islam-i halq*) rather than orthodox Islam (*Islam-i kitab*) is dominant, and is primarily concerned with the celebration of life cycle rituals, the observation of the principle of sacrifice and the preservation of mystical beliefs. The practice of shrine pilgrimage (*ziyarat*) is at the heart of Islam in Turkmenistan. To be sure, some of the most widespread practices among Turkmen believers are considered heretical by purist Muslims, such as warding off the evil eye by plants and amulets or performing pilgrimages to the graves of local Sufi saints. As Central Asian expert Ahmed Rashid pointed out, fundamentalists have criticized Sufi followers to little avail for diverging from the commands of the Quran and tolerating non-Islamic influences.[475] The inherent tension between folk Islam and an Islamist ideology that calls for greater orthodoxy has served to bewilder any potential popular support for the latter. Despite the apparent dearth of Islamist activity, the closed nature of

[475] N. Shadrova, Deputy Chairman of the Kyrgyz State Committee on Religious Affairs, Bishkek. Personal communication, September 1999.

polity and society in Turkmenistan has made it difficult to ascertain the presence or absence of Islamist groups, and has given rise to speculation that Islamist activity may exist within the former Soviet republic. For example, official reports on an unexpectedly fierce two-day battle that broke out in a northern suburb of Ashgabat in September 2008 provided little information, prompting Russian media and some Western wire services to make unconfirmed assertions that the violence was instigated by Islamist extremists.[476] Similarly, despite reports that the Islamist group Hizb-ut-Tahrir has won converts in Turkmenistan's labor camps and prisons, a significance presence in the country has yet to be established.[477]

In addition to the popular nature of Islam, the durable changes to religious practice experienced by the population during the Soviet period provides a second explanation for the limited appeal of Islamist groups in Turkmenistan. Some analysts have argued that the Soviet legacy is the key factor hindering the present-day development of Islamism in Central Asia, given that the region was isolated from the rest of the Muslim world—including its intellectual centers—for more than seventy years.[478] During Soviet rule, Islam in particular was rejected as contrary to modernization, with the consequence that all but a handful of mosques were either closed or turned into museums of atheism. The clergy was persecuted and religious literature was destroyed, all Islamic courts of law, *waqf* holdings (Muslim religious endowments that formed the basis of clerical economic power), and Muslim primary and secondary schools were liquidated. Local shrines acted as the real centers of religious life in the absence of functioning mosques during the Soviet period, thereby ensuring that they have remained an important part of worship in Turkmenistan. However, while

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476 Ahmed Rashid, *op. cit., p.*246-247.

477 Annette Bohr, "Turkmenistan", in *Nations in Transit. Democratization from Central Europe to Eurasia 2009* (New York: Freedom House, 2009), p.522, http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/nit/2009/Turkmenistan-final.pdf; Vitaliy Ponomarev, *Sobytiia v Ashkhabade 10–13 Sentiabria 2000g* [Events in Ashkhabad September 10–13, 2008] (Moscow: Memorial Human Rights Center, November 5, 2008).

478 *Cracks in the Marble: Turkmenistan's Failing Dictatorship*, International Crisis Group, January 2003, p.25, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/centralasia/turkmenistan/044%20Cracks%20in%20the%20Marble%20Turkmenistan%20Failing%20Dictatorship.ashx.

it is undeniable that the aggressive anti-religious campaign launched by the Soviet authorities placed even greater distance between Central Asian Islam and the Islam practiced in 'mainstream' Muslim countries in the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia or Africa, Islamic doctrine had never taken as firm root in Turkmenistan as it had in other Muslim areas, including the old sedentary territories of Central Asia. Well before the Bolshevik Revolution, the Turkmen, like other nomadic people, preferred to pray in private rather than visit a mosque.[479] A mobile lifestyle necessarily favoured a non-scriptural, popular version of Islam while naturally curtailing the presence of professional clergy. As the expert Adrienne Edgar noted, any man who could read and recite prayers was given the title of *mullah*, or cleric.[480] Particularly in the nomadic regions, teachers of Sufi orders, or *ishans*, played a more influential role than the *ulma* (Muslim scholars). The independent Turkmen tribes lacked Muslim *Qazis* who judged in accordance with Islamic law, with the result that *sharia* only held sway in the sphere of family law, and was implemented by mullas at birth, circumcision, marriage, and funeral ceremonies.[481] In the twenty-first century, Turkmens continue to be governed less by Islamic law than by tribal customary law, or *adat*, which has been passed down for many centuries. As the majority of Turkmens do not practice their religion in a formal or institutional way, mosques remain conspicuously empty, including Central Asia's largest and grandest mosque, the Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque in former President Niyazov's hometown of Gypjak, which is only visited by a significant number of male worshippers on Fridays.

The strict state control of religion is a third, albeit less important, reason why Islamism has thus far failed to attract a significant following in Turkmenistan. Were Islamist groups to appear in Turkmenistan, state security forces would most certainly act swiftly and firmly to repress all manifestations of activity? In

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[479] Krzysztof Strachota and Maciej Falkowski, *Jihad vs. The Great New Game: Paradoxes Of Militant Islamic threats In Central Asia* (Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, January 2010), p.48-49.
[480] Carole Blackwell, *Tradition and Society in Turkmenistan: Gender, Oral Culture and Song* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2001), p.35.
[481] Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation*. *The Making Of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p.26.

order to prevent the emergence of Islam as a locus of oppositional activity, the Turkmen leadership has acted thoroughly to co-opt the official religious establishment. Beginning in the late 1980s, Turkmenistan's iron-fisted ruler, Saparmurat Niyazov, thoroughly co-opts the official religious establishment. He was the first secretary of the Communist Party of the Turkmen SSR from 1985-1991 and the country's first president from 1991 until his death in 2006, sanctioned the revival of Muslim practices while simultaneously striving to keep religion within official structures. Thus, Niyazov endorsed the construction of mosques, the teaching of basic Islamic principles in state schools, the restoration of holy places and the restitution of Islamic holidays. Whereas in 1987 there were only four functioning mosques in the Turkmen SSR, by 1992 that number had risen to 83, with another 64 mosques under construction.[482] In 1991, Turkmenistan's first *Madrasa* was founded in Dashoguz to alleviate the country's acute shortage of trained religious clergy. Shrine pilgrimage was acknowledged by Niyazov as a fundamental component of Turkmen identity and even as an expression of patriotism. Seeking to improve their Islamic credentials, both Niyazov and his successor, Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov, have made pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina, thereby adding the title of *hajji* to their already long lists of distinctions. Yet, even while taking limited measures to promote Islam, the Turkmen leadership required all religious communities to obtain legal registration and banned all religious parties. In April 1994, Niyazov set up a Council for Religious Affairs, the *Gengesh*, within the presidential apparatus "to ensure the observance of the law." In July 2000, a long-serving official in the *Gengesh* acknowledged that his organization controls the selection, promotion, and dismissal of all clergy in Turkmenistan, thereby allowing the state to exert control on religious matters right down to the village level.[483] In 1997, the leadership initiated a crackdown on Islamic activity by closing many of the mosques that had been opened just a

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[482] Paul Georg Geiss, *Pre-Tsarist and Tsarist Central Asia: Communal Commitment And Political Order In Change* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), p.38.

[483] Alexander Verkhovsky, ed., *Islam i politicheskaya bor'ba v stranakh SNG* [Islam and political struggle in the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States)] (Moscow: Panorama, 1992), p. 27.

few years earlier (mostly in Mary Oblast), shutting down virtually all institutions of Islamic learning, halting the importation of foreign religious literature, and tightening restrictions on the legal registration of religious communities. These restrictions endure to this day. Congregations, are not registered with the Ministry of Fairness (formerly the Ministry of Justice) are prohibited from gathering publicly and disseminating religious materials, with violators subject to penalties under the country's administrative code. The Dashoguz *Madrasa* was closed in 2001, and in 2005, cutbacks were made at the Faculty of Muslim Theology at Magtymguly Turkmen State University, which remained the only official institution for training imams. To an even greater degree than other Central Asian Muslims, Turkmens have been unable to travel and receive an education in *Madrasa* abroad. The government has aimed to restrict the population's contact with fellow believers abroad by limiting the number of Turkmen Muslims—including secret police and state officials—performing the *hajj* to Mecca each year to 188 pilgrims, which represents less than 5% of the quota allocated by the Saudi authorities.[484] As in other Central Asian states, Turkmen authorities have sought to limit unwanted Islamist trends by promoting a vision of Islam that is concerned with the preservation of tradition. In similar fashion to neighbouring Uzbekistan, the leadership has attempted to capitalize on the popularity of Sufism in order to encourage religion to conform to local popular practices as well as to combat the emergence of Islamism. As far as orthodox Islamic doctrine rejects and condemns as idolatrous some Sufi practices, such as the veneration of local saints and local shrine pilgrimages,[485] it is held that the promotion of Sufism will serve to dampen any inclination among Turkmen believers to support the more purist and potentially Islamist-forms of ideology.[486] Consequently, the Turkmen leadership has taken some steps to foster the Sufi tradition and incorporate it into the regime's larger nation-building project. Thus, Niyazov

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[484] S. Demidov, "Religioznie protsessy v postsovetskom Turkmenistane", [Religious protests in post-Soviet Turkmenistan, *Tsentral'naia Aziia* i Kavkaz no. 5 (2001).

[485] Felix Corley, "Turkmenistan Religious Freedom Survey, August 2008," Forum 18 News Service, August 5, 2008, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1167

[486] Maria Elisabeth Louw, *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (London: Routledge, 2007), p.50.

leadership provided the mosque and mausoleum complex of the twelfth-century Sufi scholar, Hoja Yusuf Hamadani, with a modern-day reconstruction. Located in the Mary Region, this holy site is one of the most important places of shrine pilgrimage in Turkmenistan, even remaining open during the Soviet period, albeit under strict control. Likewise, rather than seeking to prohibit local pilgrimages to sacred places, both Niyazov and Berdimuhamedov governments have encouraged it, even providing free accommodation for pilgrims in some instances.[487] In 2009, citing fears concerning the spread of swine flu, Turkmen authorities barred aspiring Muslim pilgrims from making the *hajj* to Saudi Arabia altogether, urging them instead to sojourn to 38 sacred sites across the country, although most of the sites had historical or cultural rather than religious significance.[488]

[487] However, as some have noted, the relationship between folk Islam, orthodox Islam and Sufism is complex. While some folk customs might contradict the precepts of *sharia*, Sufi brotherhoods often successfully used the *murid* organization to spread orthodox Islam. Geiss, *Pre-Tsarist and Tsarist Central Asia*, 94n3.

[488] *Cracks in the Marble*, op. cit., p.25.

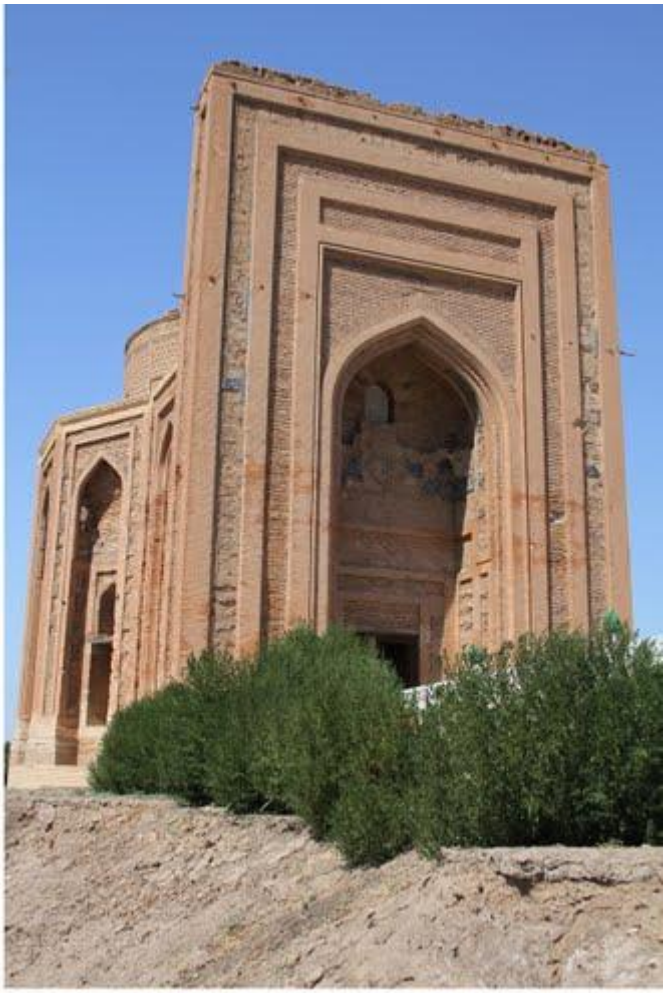

Fig 15: (Dashoguz Madrasa)
Source: http://www.panoramio.com/photo/47817689

Under Niyazov, the state-sponsored form of Islam in Turkmenistan underwent an unusual twist when the president made his extensive cult of personality a centerpiece of religious practice by configuring himself as a prophet with his own sacred book, the *Ruhnama* (Book of the Soul). Niyazov regularly urged his country's citizens to study and memorize passages from it, and knowledge of the *Ruhnama* was made a requirement for university entrance and for work in the public sector, which remained the main source of employment. Imams were obliged to display the *Ruhnama* inside mosques and to quote from it in sermons or face possible removal or even arrest. In direct violation of *Sharia*, Niyazov even ordered that passages from the *Ruhnama* be inscribed alongside passages from the Quran on the walls of the cathedral mosque in Gypjak; an inscription above the main arch reads, "*Ruhnama* is a holy book; the Quran is

Allah's book." In 2003, the country's long-serving senior Muslim cleric and deputy chairman of the *Gengesh*, Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah, was replaced for expressing dissent by repeatedly objecting to the de facto status of the *Ruhnama* as a sacred book on a par with the Quran, and to its extensive use in mosques. In 2004, he was sentenced to 22 years in prison on treason charges, but was released in August 2007. Upon his release, he thanked the president and accepted a post as an adviser at the president's State Council for Religious Affairs, thus remaining under the close supervision of administration officials. Since coming to power in 2007, President Berdimuhamedov has gradually phased out the cult of Niyazov's quasi-spiritual guidebook for the nation, although its study remains part of the education curriculum.[489]

[489] Felix Corley, 'Turkmenistan: Exit Bans, Haj Ban, Visa Denials Part Of State Religious Isolation Policy', Forum 18 News Service, February 2010, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1403; Bruce Pannier, "Turkmen Pilgrims Make A Homegrown Hajj", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, November 25, 2009, http://www.rferl.org/content/Turkmen_Pilgrims_Make_A-Homegrown_Hajj/1887880.html

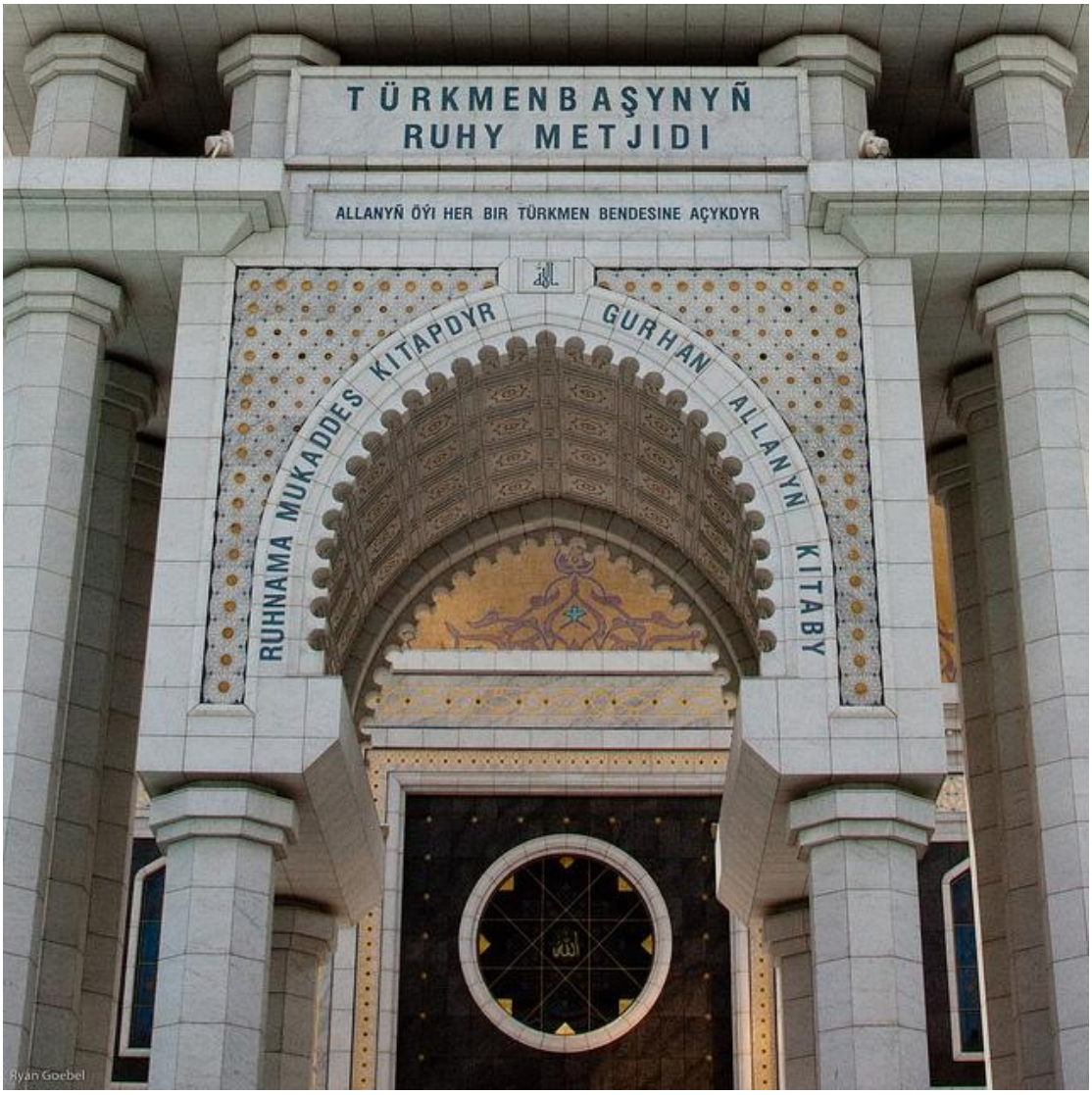

Fig 16: (Turkmenbasynyn Ruhy Metjidi)
Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/ryan_roxx/4643767659/?q=turkmenbashi ruhy mosque

Radical Islamic Movements

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, several small Islamic groups emerged in Central Asia. Most were very short-lived and little is known of them other than their names.[164] The great majority was located in the Fergana Valley. In Kazakhstan, a xenophobic nationalist group, *Alash* (named after the legendary ancestor of the Kazaks), advocated a return to Islamic precepts; however, it found few supporters and by 1995 had all but ceased to exist. There are occasional reports of other Islamic groups in southern Kazakhstan, but information is very scanty. No radical movements have so far been noted in Turkmenistan (though this does not necessarily mean the absence of such

movements, merely that information is more tightly controlled there than elsewhere). Moreover, the pervasive nature of folk Islam, together with the Soviet-era repression of religion and the authoritarian nature of the country's political system, have acted as barriers to the growth of Islamist ideology in Turkmenistan. Thus, the leadership has sought to capitalize on the popularity of Sufism in order to encourage religion to conform to local popular practices as well as to combat the emergence of Islamism. As in other parts of Central Asia, the distinction between religious and 'national' rituals is blurred in Turkmenistan; since the perestroika period of the late 1980s, the leadership has attempted to co-opt Islam as a fundamental component of its overarching nation-building campaign.

State's Policy towards Religion

As in most political affairs, Turkmenistan has taken radically a different course from other Central Asian states in its policy on religion. There is effectively no separation between state and religion. President Niyazov has promoted his own personalized pseudo-religion as the official religion of the state. Although Sunni Islam is the official religion of ethnic Turkmens, most incorporate shamanistic beliefs dating from the nomadic period of their history to create their own form of popular Islam. The government has encouraged this, while taking strict control of all organized religious activity. Niyazov has spent millions on constructing huge mosques and religious buildings. There were only four mosques in Soviet times, but an estimated 318 were in operation in 2003.[490] However, many mosques are primarily aimed at his own glorification, rather than the religious needs of the people. Few Turkmens go to mosques; mostly they pray at home, or visit sacred sites. Pre-Islamic rituals combining shamanistic, Manichean, Zoroastrian, Nestorian and Parthian elements are still observed. Moreover, radical forms of Islam found little ground in

[490] Bohr, "Turkmenistan", in *Nations in Transit. Democratization from Central Europe to Eurasia 2010* (New York: Freedom House, 2010), p.544, http://www.freedomhouse.hu/images/nit2010/NIT-2010-Turkmenistan-final.pdf

Turkmenistan[491], although the government has suppressed any sign of external influence, expelling hundreds of foreign Muslims, mostly Iranian teachers, in 2000. Some have suggested that young people could be attracted by more radical forms of Sunni Islam, largely as a result of repression and socio-economic decline, but there is little basis for it in traditional religious beliefs.[492] In place of religious pluralism, Niyazov has developed a pseudo-religious cult centered on his own personality. His book, the *Ruhnama*, is not only the main text for schoolchildren and university students but is also read in mosques and treated on a par with the Quran. He has apparently made enquiries in the Islamic world about the possible reaction to declaring himself a new prophet of Islam.

Laws on religious belief

Although the Constitution provides freedom of religious belief, but the practice of any religion is severely restricted, except for two officially registered groups, Sunni Muslims and Russian Orthodox. The 1991 Law on Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Organizations also guarantees freedom of belief but requires all religious activity to be registered by the Ministry of Justice. A 1995 amendment requires religious groups to have at least 500 members in each locality in which they wish to register in order to gain legal status. In practice, this means that – unlike Sunni Muslims and Russian Orthodox believers – members of the Armenian Apostolic, Baptist, Pentecostals, Seventh- Day Adventist, Jehovah's Witnesses, Bahai and Hare Krishna churches are unable to register and are therefore severely persecuted. Naturally, any Muslim community wishing to establish an independent congregation is similarly outlawed.

The main government body used to control religious affairs is the Council (*Gengesh*) for Religious Affairs under President Niyazov. Although described

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491 Abasov, R., Islamskoje vozrozhdenije v tsentral'noaziatskikh novykh nezavisimykh gosudarstvakh, *Polis*, No. 3 (27), 1995, pp.61-7.

492 U.S. Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report 2002: Turkmenistan", op. cit.

as playing an 'intermediary role' between the government bureaucracy and registered religious organizations, it is purely a controlling organ for the state. There is little distinction between the CRA and the religious hierarchy. The Imam of the Goek Tepe Mosque chairs it, and the three deputy chairmen are the Mufti of Turkmenistan, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, and a government representative. The CRA controls the activities of official clergy through Turkmenistan's Muslim Religious Board, which employs all Muslim clerics. According to the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, the CRA oversees the 'selection, promotion, and dismissal of all Sunni mullas and Russian Orthodox clergy'.[493] This strict control structure provides no opportunity for legal religious activity outside the boundaries set by the state. The main instruments of repression are the National Security Committee and the regular police. The KNB is particularly involved in monitoring Muslim clergy and unofficial religious activity. Any clergy opposing the government or propagating religious ideas not in conformity with the official position risk dismissal or worse. In 2000, police arrested Hoja Ahmed Orazgylych, an Islamic cleric who had criticized the government. He was sentenced to internal exile.[494] There is no scope for any political opposition in general, and particularly from within religious structures: Muslim clergy are required to accord due respect to Niyazov and the *Ruhnama* during services. Unregistered religious groups face constant harassment and sometimes arrest. In November 1999 security forces destroyed a church belonging to the Seventh Day Adventists in Ashgabat, and members of the congregation have been regularly harassed ever since. Baptists have also faced constant pressure and sometimes been detained. In April 2002, the government closed all Sunday schools run by the Bahai. The U.S. government reports a sharp drop in cases of harassment of Christians in 2002, and in January 2002 Shageldy Atekov, a Baptist who had been in prison since 1999, apparently because of his religious beliefs, was

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493 Michael Fredholm, "The Prospects for Internal Unrest in Turkmenistan", April 2003, Conflict Studies Research Centre, Defence Academy, UK.

494 International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, "Religious Intolerance in Selected OSCE Countries in 2000", report to the Seminar on Freedom of Religion or Belief in the OSCE Region, The Hague, 26 June 2001, p.28, available at: www.ihf-hr.org

released. Nevertheless, there is no sign of real liberalization, and the situation is unlikely to change while President Niyazov remains in power.

In June 2001, Niyazov ordered the closure of a Madrasa in Dashawuz, the last independent Islamic education facility in the country,[495] leaving the Faculty of Muslim Theology at Magtymguly Turkmen State University in Ashgabat as the only authorized academic institution in Turkmenistan to train imams. In 2002, the president set limits on the number of students who could study there. Foreign lecturers, who were all Turkish, were forced to leave the country to be replaced by local, less qualified teachers. Under a decree issued by the education ministry on 5 July, 20 students were expelled from the preparatory department of the Theological Faculty which results the decline in the level of education among practicing imams has led to a growth in respect for the traditional religious leaders. "*They have preserved their authority and people go to them for weddings and funerals, the authorities don't attack them.*"[496] However, Muslims are not allowed to travel abroad for religious education, Russian Orthodox men from Turkmenistan are allowed to study for the priesthood at the Tashkent seminary. All education establishments are forced to study the *Ruhnama*, the basis of Niyazov's cult of personality. It is a mixture of folk sayings, Turkmen history and pseudo-spirituality that lays the basis for an effectively alternative state religion. Its use in mosques on a par with the Quran is in direct contradiction with Islamic teachings, and must cause considerable difficulty to clergy and other believers. The president of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov, has ordered that his own words be inscribed alongside verses of the Quran on a new mosque being built just outside the capital Ashgabat, intended to be the biggest in all Asia. He also announced that craftsmen would add lines from his book called "the *Ruhnama*" on the immense facade. His absolute temporal power is now taking on an ever more spiritual overtone. It is the latest stage in what seems like a blurring between

[495] Jean-Christophe Peuch, "Turkmenistan: Leader tightens grip on unofficial Islam", RFE/RL, 28 June 2001, www.rferl/org
[496] Ibid.

Turkmenbashi's earthly power and religious authority. *Ruhnama* is now often placed in the doorway of mosques so that worshippers can touch it on their way in. In an echo of the practice in Sunni Muslim mosques, Orthodox priests reportedly received instructions from the end of 2000 to quote from the *Ruhnama* in sermons and to *preach to devotee about the virtues of living in Turkmenistan and of the policies of Turkmenbashi.* Niyazov only wanted to implement his own personality cult for which he imposed *Article* 205 of the Code of Administrative Offences, which dates back to the Soviet period, specifies fines for those refusing to register their religious communities of five to ten times the minimum monthly wage, with typical fines of 2,50,000 Turkmen Manats (363 Norwegian Kroner, 44 Euros or 48 US Dollars at the inflated official exchange rate). Registration represents total state control over each religious community. Believers who want to receive information from fellow-believers abroad face virtually insurmountable obstacles. Access to the Internet is possible only via state providers that exert strict control over what information can be accessed. The majority of international religious websites are simply not accessible by an Internet user. Moreover, a special computer program searches emails for coded words that could be used to send "*unreliable information*", while "*a suspicious message*" will simply not reach the addressee. Religious literature is no longer published; Mosques and Russian Orthodox churches often have small kiosks where a limited quantity of literature is available. A typical Orthodox church bookstall might have a few prayer books, small icons and calendars, with the Bible available only erratically - and often, at about 12 US Dollars [62,400 Turkmen Manats, 78 Norwegian Kroner, or 10 Euros], too expensive for the badly-paid local people. Supplies of religious literature and articles to Orthodox churches are equally erratic, with no official distribution of books, icons, candles, and baptismal crosses. Customs officers sometimes allow travelers returning to the country to bring in a small quantity of religious literature for personal use. However, Orthodox priests had taken literature from them at the border on their return to the country. Hare Krishna devotees, Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses

cannot import religious literature. Religious literature is routinely confiscated from members of unregistered religious minorities during police raids on their homes. Orthodox believers trying to receive alternative information are in a more difficult situation than Sunni Muslims. Under a September 2002 presidential decree, direct subscription to Russian newspapers and magazines, including religious publications such as the Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate, is banned. Even Orthodox priests do not receive the Journal regularly and are forced to rely on old copies they pick up when they are visiting Moscow or Tashkent. Officials have not simply restricted themselves of banning the receipt of political information from the former metropolis. Purely religious communications between local Orthodox believers and Russia have inevitably also been obstructed. As Turkmenistan has become even more isolated from Russia, individual Orthodox believers have become more isolated from the Moscow Patriarchate. Much religious activity has of necessity to be shrouded in secrecy, with believers of having to hide their faith and worship from the knowledge of intrusive state officials. In response to the pressure, all unregistered communities have seen the numbers of their active members fall. Yet despite the severe controls and the threat of punishment, the religious believers practice their various faiths as best they can, while waiting for better times.[497]

President's cult imposed on religious communities

Amongst pressures on religious communities is a government-enforced cult of President Niyazov's personality. Muslims face mounting pressure to venerate the president's two-volume ideological book, the *Ruhnama*, while Russian Orthodox churches must have a minimum of two copies of the *Ruhnama*. One government minister claimed that the *Ruhnama* would make up for shortcomings in both the Bible and the Quran, neither of which was, he claimed, fully adequate for the spiritual needs of Turkmens. The personality

[497] Felix Corley, op. cit., *August 2008,* Forum 18 News Service, July 22, 2005, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=614

cult includes a massive mosque decorated with quotations from the *Ruhnama*, a gold statue in Ashgabat that revolves to follow the sun and a monument to the *Ruhnama*. It was a priority task for clergymen to disseminate the lofty ideas in the leader's sacred books on the duties of parents and children. Registered religious minorities are often pressured into hanging the country's flag, state emblem and portraits of Turkmenistan's President Saparmurat Niyazov at their places of worship and other restrictions are also imposed.[498] As part of the grotesque government-enforced cult of President Niyazov's personality, Muslim community faces mounting pressure to venerate the president's two volume ideological book, the *Ruhnama*, while Russian Orthodox churches must have a minimum of two copies of the *Ruhnama* in parish libraries. The massive mosque built at taxes in the president's native place (Kipchak) in central Turkmenistan which has been decorated with quotations from the work and up to a quarter of the book stands for copies of the Quran are taken up with the *Ruhnama* and other presidential publications. An apparently full-time official at the massive Saparmurat Hajji mosque in the village of Geok-tepe near the capital Ashgabat is present to 'remind' the imam which pages of the work he is to read from at prayer times. Although the president's cult of personality – which includes a gold statue in Ashgabat that revolves to follow the sun and a monument to the *Ruhnama* – began in the mid-1990s, the cult was stepped up after the publication of the first volume of the *Ruhnama* in 2001, which Niyazov described at the launch ceremony as a "holy book". Officials later likened it to the Quran. The second *Ruhnama* volume was ceremonially launched in September 2004. In 2000, one government minister claimed that the *Ruhnama* would make up for shortcomings in both the Bible and the Quran, neither of which was, he claimed, fully adequate for the spiritual needs of Turkmens. Controversy was stirred among Muslims when news spread that the Kipchak mosque– named after the president - was decorated with quotations from the *Ruhnama*. Indeed, to enter the main

[498] Felix Corley, "Turkmenistan Religious Freedom Survey *October 2005"*, Forum 18 News Service, at: http://www.forum18.org/

entrance of the mosque, visitors have to walk through a gateway over which is written in Turkmen: *"Ruhnama* is a holy book; The Quran is Allah's book". On one side of the gateway is the text of the oath of allegiance to the president carved in stone and on the other the text of the national anthem. On 11 February, Muslim leaders across the country attended a meeting in Ashgabat at the government's Gengeshi for Religious Affairs jointly hosted by the office of the Mufti under the slogan "Our esteemed leader President, Saparmurat Hajji is a true protector of clergymen". There imams were enjoined to preach from the *Ruhnama*. "Speakers at the meeting emphasized the need for unity and accord in order to reach great heights," state television reported the same day. "It was mentioned that it was a priority task for clergymen to disseminate the lofty ideas in our great leader's sacred books on the duties of parents and children." State television said speakers described the volume as "an indispensable help in giving honest and pure education to the young generation of Turkmenistan's golden age". Given the large proportion of school children's time that is taken up studying the president's works and learning them (even the English translation of the *Ruhnama* is used to teach English), the endorsement by imams can only be helpful for the president. All imams in state-approved mosques are appointed by the Gengeshi. One registered Sunni mosque in Ashgabat, like most government offices, schools, factories and some places of worship, has a "*Ruhnama* room" honouring the president's book; just as in the Soviet period, space was set aside to honour Lenin and the communist movement. Unlike the new Kipchak mosque, which was inaugurated amid great fanfare in October 2004, the mosque in Geok-tepe – completed in 1996 – is not carved with inscriptions by Niyazov. However, the layman based at the mosque responsible for overseeing the teaching of the *Ruhnama* told recent visitors it is "quite normal" to teach from the book. Neither the Kipchak nor the Geok-tepe mosques have visible portraits of Niyazov. Some other registered religious communities have bowed to pressure to display the president's portrait at their places of worship, even if they find this unnecessary or offensive. In some ways, the Russian Orthodox Church has been able to escape

the worst aspects of the cult of president. Other Orthodox sources insist that their priests are not required to quote from the *Ruhnama* or even mention it in sermons but most parishioners work for the state and get the *Ruhnama* there. Pressure from officials on Muslims and the Orthodox to accept the cult of personality is reportedly strong in the northeastern Dashoguz region, where ethnic Uzbeks make up about half the population. The authorities have forced imams to place the Turkmen flag above mosque entrances and every sermon delivered by imams has to begin with a eulogy to "Turkmenbashi". A copy of the *Ruhnama* is placed prominently at the entrance to every mosque and believers have to touch it as if it were a sacred object.[499] Similar instructions have been given to Sunni Muslim mosques elsewhere and to Russian Orthodox churches. In other places too, including the southern town of Tedjen, local officials have pressured the Orthodox to put up the national flag and presidential portraits on church land on state holidays. Orthodox believers insisted there are no written rules on what national symbols must be displayed in places of worship and how the *Ruhnama* must be used. However, some local officials – especially in towns away from Ashgabat – like to show "excessive zeal" in promoting the president's cult of personality.[500] Those who cannot accept the cult of personality denied registration or deciding not to apply because of what they regard as the unacceptable conditions attached to registration, scorn the cult of personality and believe other faiths have wrongly accepted as a condition of registration, like hanging the country's flag and a portrait of the president in places of worship. These were unacceptable demands when the constitution is clear: religion and the state are separate;[501] even then, religious communities are being forced to accept national symbols, presidential portraits and treat the president's writings almost as sacred texts. Intermittent protests took place in summer 2004 against the enforced imposition of the *Ruhnama* on mosques. Anonymous anti-government leaflets

[499] Felix Corley, "Turkmenistan Religious Freedom Survey August 2008", Forum 18 News Service, February 28, 2005, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=521
[500] Felix Corley, op. cit., Forum 18 News Service, March 4, 2004, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=268
[501] Felix Corley, op. cit., Forum 18 News Service, February 28, 2005, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=521

circulating in Ashgabat in early July contained calls for Muslims not to go to mosques where the *Ruhnama* is cited together with the Quran.[502] Sunni Muslim Mosques are reported to have seen attendance slump as, in response to government orders, imams placed copies of the *Ruhnama* in mosques with equal prominence as copies of the Quran. Imams are, at least in theory, required to recite the oath of loyalty to the president and country at the end of the Namaz. President Niyazov told Muslims in 2000 that they were to renounce the Hadith, sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) that do not appear in the Quran but are valued by devout Muslims only. One Mosque was closed down and four Ashgabat mosques were demolished in the autumn 2004 campaign of mosque destruction by the State Security Ministry secret police for not putting the *Ruhnama* on the same reading stand as the Quran and for the refusal of Imams to read the *Ruhnama* in their mosques.[503]([504]) Niyazov ousted the Chief Mufti, Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah, an ethnic Uzbek who had led Turkmenistan's Muslims for the previous ten years, for his lack of enthusiasm for the campaign to promote the *Ruhnama* in mosques, and had him sentenced to 22 years' imprisonment in March 2004.[505] Although, Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah had gone along with earlier official's move related to the cult of personality, removing several imams from mosques in the late 1990s - including a leading imam in Dashoguz - for refusing to recite the special verses in praise of the president that imams are supposed to recite during Friday prayers. Religious minority prisoners – including Jehovah's Witnesses and Baptists - have not benefited under successive presidential prisoner amnesties, as they refused to confess their guilt and swear the national oath of allegiance to the president and country on a copy of the Quran in the local mosque. The oath is considered by many to be blasphemous and reads: "Turkmenistan, beloved homeland, my native land, both in my thoughts and in my heart I am eternally with you. For

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[502] Felix Corley, op. cit., Forum 18 News Service, September 10, 2004, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=408
[503] Felix Corley, op. cit., Forum 18 News Service, August 9, 2004, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=390
[504] Felix Corley, op. cit., Forum 18 News Service, November 28, 2003, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=187
[505] Felix Corley, op. cit., Forum 18 News Service, January 4, 2005, http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=181

the slightest evil caused to you, let my hand be cut off. For the slightest defamation against you, may my tongue lose its strength. In the moment of treachery to the fatherland, to the president, to your holy banner, let my breathing cease."

Fig 17: (Golden statue in Ashgabat)
Source: http://www.galenfrysinger.com/turkmenbashi.htm

Religious Freedom in Turkmenistan

President Niyazov was elected to office by the TCP on 27 October 1990 and retained his position throughout the process of independence. Since that date, numerous and regular human rights violations have occurred. Although the country's constitution guarantees religious freedom still, the government's *Council for Religious Affairs* and the secret police have discouraged all religious activities. Critics of the party or the president are suppressed and censorship utilized to support government ideology. Religious minorities, especially those that do not fit the president's ideal of Turkmen culture, are also

suppressed. Vitally Ponomarev of the Moscow-based Central Asia Human Rights Information Centre states that 'Turkmen authorities have increasingly used falsified criminal charges to combat minority religious groups'.[506] Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostal Christians, other Protestant denominations, and Bahais have been particularly targeted, usually on the spurious grounds of holding unregistered religious gatherings. A 2001 US State Department report on religious freedom in Turkmenistan claims that the governmental harassment of unregistered religious groups has intensified in recent times. However, the report makes the important point that this harassment is not present at a societal level.[507] Socially the vast majority of interactions between religious traditions appear to have been peaceful, tolerant and inclusive. Turkmenistan's constitution provides for freedom of religion, as does the 1991 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, which was amended in 1995 and 1997. In practice, however, the law has been interpreted to control religious life tightly and to restrict the activities of all religions severely. Article 6 of Turkmenistan's Constitution states that people are free to practice religion;[508] Article 11 states: 'Everyone has the right independently to determine her or his own religious preference, to practice any religion alone or in association with others, to practice no religion, to express and disseminate beliefs related to religious preference, and to participate in the performance of religious cults, rituals, and ceremonies'.[509] The government's legal justification for discrimination against religious groups comes from Article 3. This ensures freedom of conscience and states that the freedom to profess a religion is subject only to restrictions necessary to safeguard 'public safety and order, life and health of the people, and morale'.[510] The vagueness in

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506 S Blagov, 'Religious Minorities Doomed in Turkmenistan', *Asia Times*, 30 September 1999, accessed 12 December 2006, http://www.atimes.com/c-asia/AI30Ag01.html

507 US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *2001 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom: Turkmenistan* (Washington, 2001).

508 Nissman, op ci.t, p.643.

509 Z T Caldwell, *A Global Review of the Denial of Religious Freedom, Summer 2001* (International Association for Religious Freedom, 2001) accessed 12 December 2010, http://www.iarf.net/GlobalIssues/Updates/Summer%202001.pdf

510 Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, '*Turkmenistan*': *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratisation in the Newly Independent States of the Former Soviet Union* (Washington, 1993) p.183.

the wording provides the government enormous latitude in interpreting the concepts of 'public safety, order, and morale'. As a result, the government seeks to maintain a close relationship with religious representatives and institutions. It does so by exercising control over all religious activities. All religious organizations must register with the government, although only two religious organizations have had an easy time doing so: the Russian Orthodox Church and the state-approved Spiritual Directorate of Muslims. In order to attain registration, an organization must have at least five hundred adult citizens in each locality in which it wishes to operate. This makes the position of minority religious traditions almost impossible, as they may not have five hundred members nationwide, and effectively prevents all but the state-approved Islam and Orthodox Christianity from registering. There are for example only an estimated one thousand Jews in Turkmenistan. The situation is further exacerbated by government officials' harassment of those who do publicly sign documents pertaining to their religious beliefs. Non-registered religious groups are prohibited from conducting religious activities, including gathering, disseminating religious materials and proselytizing. The Baptists actually meet the numerical criteria for registration in some regions, yet were long denied recognition.[511] When citizens openly proclaim their attempt to register, authorities regularly harass signatories in order to make them withdraw their support.[512] Members of religious groups not approved by the state have faced harassment, imprisonment, loss of employment and confiscation of property. These measures have typically been carried out by the National Security Council (KNB, formerly KGB), which appears to have long been under the direct control of the president. In February 2000, authorities arrested Muslim religious leader Khoja Ahmed Orazgylych for criticizing the government and the president in a Radio Liberty broadcast. Subsequently, they demolished the mosque he operated and burnt copies of his translation of the

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511 F Kazemzadeh, *Testimony on the State of Democratization and Human Rights in Turkmenistan,* presented before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 21 March 2000.

512 International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, *Religious Intolerance in Selected OSCE Countries in 2000: Report to the Seminar on Freedom of Religion or Belief in the OSCE Region* (The Hague, 2001), p. 26.

Quran that the government itself had commissioned and approved.[513] In June 2001, a family of Jehovah's Witnesses was evicted from their home for conducting Bible study meetings there.[514] Members of Jehovah's Witnesses who had been imprisoned for conscientious objection were not released at the end of their term because they refused to swear an oath of loyalty to the president.[515] The International Society for Krishna Consciousness has also been the target of harassment and in 2001 the government demolished their temple in Mary. The Keston News Service reported in February 2001 that local authorities of the Niyazov district of Ashgabat had sealed the country's last functioning Baptist church. In March 2001, the authorities reportedly broke the seals and removed the church's contents. The church had been in existence for 20 years, was corporately owned by the congregation and had been registered under the Soviet Union, but had lost registration in 1997 under the new law.[516] A further, unregistered Baptist congregation was also evicted in March 2001, this time from the private house in which it had held religious services for over twenty years.[517] Finally, in early May 2002, Protestants in a Turkmen village were ordered to swear an oath on a copy of President Niyazov's 'spiritual book', the *Ruhnama*, renouncing the Bible and their faith in Jesus.[518] Niyazov's rule is characterized by a grotesque cult of personality, with ever-present statues and portraits. Turkmenistan's deliberate isolation from the outside world and the punitive measures taken against those engaged in unauthorized religious activity make religious freedom reporting very difficult. Believers often fear retribution for reporting their difficulties. Religious activity is overseen by KNB for work with social organizations and religious groups. People known to be active in religious communities are recorded with the security agencies locally and can be summoned at any moment for

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513 Badertinov, op cit, p.385.
514 Jehovah's Witnesses Office of Public Information, 'A Turkmenistan Family Loses Apartment for Studying the Bible', 29 June 2001, accessed 12 December 2010, http://www.jwmedia.org/region/asia_pacific/turkmenistan/english/releases/religious_freedom/tuk_e010629.htm
515 U.S. Department of State, *2001 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom: Turkmenistan*
516 *Ibid*.
517 *Ibid.*
518 F Corley, 'Turkmenistan: Protestants Forced to Renounce their Faith', *Keston News Service*, 17 May 2002.

interrogation. Young men are restricted to go to the mosque, five times a day, for prayers. They (secret police) also summoned the parents of a devout Muslim conscript who prayed regularly in his military unit and warned that they should extract a statement from him declaring that he was renouncing his faith. Local MSS secret police officers regularly summon Muslim and Orthodox clerics to report on activity within their communities and also run "spies" in each Muslim and Orthodox community, sometimes as many as half a dozen. In addition to their spies - who attend the religious community solely at MSS behest to gain information - there might be another ten or fifteen believers who are regularly interviewed by MSS Officers and forced to reveal details of the community's religious life. Moreover, a religious board, Gengeshi, is made for Religious Affairs - which is headed by an imam, Yagshimurat Atamuradov - has nominal responsibility for religious affairs, and has headquarters in Ashgabat and branch offices in each of Turkmenistan's five velayats (regions). The Gengeshi's main job appears to be approving clerical appointments in the Sunni Muslim and Orthodox communities. "*Imams are chosen by the Gengeshi and are then approved by the president,*" Niyazov confirmed this in March 2004, when he instructed Gengeshi officials to make sure they appointed all imams, warning them not to allow local believers to do so. Places of worship of a variety of faiths have faced demolition - as with numerous mosques most recently in 2004, as well as the Adventist church in Ashgabat in 1999 and two Hare Krishna temples in the eastern Mary region in 1999 - and confiscation - as with the Baptist and Pentecostal churches in Ashgabat in 2001. The six mosques were demolished in Ashgabat in autumn 2004 and one was turned into a police outreach post. Interestingly, the one minority religion that has so far been able to practice quasi-legally and without harassment has been the Catholic Church. Its three priests enjoy diplomatic immunity.[519] These are just some of many continuing examples of restrictions and violations of religious freedom the people of Turkmenistan have faced in recent years. Those particularly active in unauthorized religious groups are regularly detained on

[519] International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, *Religious Intolerance,* p.29.

fabricated charges, and university students have been threatened with expulsion if they continue 'illegal' religious activities. The *Gengeshi* (Council for Religious Affairs), Justice Ministry, the police and local authorities, in addition to the KNB, have all been involved in these acts. These institutions are understood to have been under the direct command of President Niyazov. It must be noted, however, that keeping an up-todate account of the state of religious freedom in Turkmenistan is difficult, as no locally based human rights groups are allowed to operate in the country. The government also restricts and controls access to religious education. Critical of religious schools in the past, President Niyazov ordered all remaining madrasas in the country closed in 2001. This measure relates to the government's position on parents who raise their children according to their religious beliefs, which it sees as detracting from a nationalist upbringing. An Adventist priest was detained in Turkmenabad in October 2000 because the children of congregation members were present at the prayer service.[520] Further restrictions have been placed on 'non-traditional' religious traditions by the ruling that foreign missionary work is prohibited. Ethnic Turkmen found to be disseminating the religious material of unregistered religious groups have been found to receive harsher physical and legal treatment than non-ethnic Turkmen,[521] further highlighting the president's peculiar aim (unsettlingly reminiscent of Nazi policies) to create a national Turkmen identity In 1997 the government passed a new version of the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, which effectively banned all religious movements apart from the two state sanctioned religions – over which the government exerts a great deal of control in the selection of religious clergy.[522] Many religious groups that had been registered for some time, including Baptists, Bahais, were suddenly 'deregistered' and prevented from reregistration due to the onerous requirements. This law appears to be an attempt to rid Turkmenistan's religious groups which were deemed to be 'non-

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[520] U.S. Department of State, *2001 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom*.
[521] *Ibid*.,
[522] United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *2002 Report on Turkmenistan* (Washington, 2002), p.3.

traditional' by the president. The legal position of religious movements is made more tenuous by corruption in the legal system in Turkmenistan. The president appoints most judges and oversees the functioning of the courts in the interests of the regime. Public prosecutors are given broad powers, whilst defendants are often denied due process rights, such as the right to a public hearing, the right to access evidence, the right to call witnesses to testify on their behalf and the right to legal counsel and representation. Compounding this, most of the available lawyers are employed by the state, while as many defendants are coerced into confession.[523] As a result the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has for a number of consecutive years recommended that Turkmenistan be designated a 'Country of Particular Concern' for 'egregious, ongoing, and systematic violations of religious freedom'.[524] The perception of the government is best expressed by former Commissioner Firuz Kazemzadeh of the USCIRF: "The government lives in fear.it is frightened of events that have overtaken Afghanistan'.[525] In 2004, President Niyazov issued decrees decriminalizing unregistered religious activity and easing some requirements for registration.[526] Nevertheless, the government continues to see religious organizations as a potential threat to its own power and stability.

[523] International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, *Judicial Systems and Human Rights in the OSCE Region in 2001* (The Hague, 2002), p.36.
[524] United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *2002 Annual Report, p.*13.
[525] Kazemzadeh, op cit.
[526] United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *2006 Annual Report, p.*167.

CHAPTER - 5
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the Central Asian republics, which had not really sought independence, found themselves independent. Unlike what happened in some other parts of the former Soviet Union, the regimes in power under the Soviet Union remained in power, and endeavoured through authoritarian means and trying to identify themselves with nascent nationalisms to suppress opposition and seek an aura of legitimacy. These regimes sought to suppress expressions of Islam and Islamic revivalism outside of state-sponsored Islam. Since the dissolution of the USSR, Turkmenistan entered a period of severe crises, decline of the production, dissolution of internal and external economic relations, expansion of poverty, loss of jobs, political disposition and deterioration. Unemployment has spiraled, education and medical care have been severely affected, and standards have fallen dramatically. During the Tsarist period, Muslims underwent unprecedented persecution; mosques were destroyed or used for non-religious purpose. Early marriage was common practice and marriage between minor girls and aged men was wide spread. Childlessness was regarded as the greatest shame. Mostly women remained the property of the family even after her husband's death. She suffers most from Tsarist capitalists landowner's exploitation and from the patriarchal condition prevalent in the family. The communist authorities of the Soviet Union, later on, inherited Central Asia from the Tsarist Russia, which collapsed during the First World War. The society in Turkmenistan presented a gloomy picture during the Soviet occupation of the country. Majority of the population predominantly Muslim had to bear the brunt of the communist rule. With the end of Soviet power, the world witnessed resurgence of Islam in Central Asian Republics. The rising influence of Islam on Turkmen society can be seen from the substantial increase in the performance of religious rituals and practices. People in general follow strict Islamic rules in marriage, circumcision and burial only. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, former Communist Party leader, Saparmurat Niyazov, became the country's first President, and he ruled Turkmenistan with an iron fist until 9 December 2006. His legacy was a regime of totalitarian control,

paranoid (fearful) dictatorship and an absence of basic freedom and human rights for the citizens of Turkmenistan. During the rule, his government gutted the country's educational system and destroyed the medical system. He erected gold plated statues of himself all over the country, his portrait hung in every public room and on every public building. He also built enormous government buildings at the expense of ordinary citizens, most of whom lived in extreme poverty, and systematically isolated Turkmenistan by outlawing foreign publications, maintaining full control over the Internet, and censoring all media. Freedom of association was extremely limited and he maintained full control over the political system, outlawing opposition and suppressing all forms of expression. Moreover, all missionaries were expelled and all religious activities have been highly repressed. He created an unrivalled cult of personality, even renaming the months of the year after members of his family. He wrote a book called *Ruhnama*, which rules much of the daily life instead of Quran. He also decreed that the *Ruhnama*, a spiritual guide, be taught in schools throughout the country and, often, be recited from memory as a precondition of obtaining jobs. Although one might expect the Turkmen case to bear some resemblance to that of the Kyrgyz, given the common significance of nomadic tribal organization in their history, in fact political and religious developments since Independence in Turkmenistan have been very different. Whereas Kyrgyzstan liberalized, Turkmenistan remained under the rule of a single party TDP and a leader whose personality cult was more extreme than anything was since the cult of Stalin. The *nomenclature* system remained largely unchanged and acceptable political activity continued to be understood in terms of 'unreserved popular support for the leadership'. State functionaries were expected to contribute to the glorification of President Niyazov, who in 1993, following the precedent of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in Turkey, assigned himself the title Turkmenbashi. As in Stalinist times, state functionaries devoted much time and energy to fawning over their great leader. Turkmenbashi, like other statesmen of his sort, regularly appeared on television urging his subjects to be more restrained in their displays of glorification.

If Stalin's goal of 'Socialism in One Country' has been perversely renewed in a new form in contemporary Turkmenistan, this was due largely to the fact that vast oil and gas fields allowed the regime to go its own way and ignore international pressure. Yet the new forms of authoritarianism differed from the old. It was not just that Marxist notions of class and labour vanished: the Soviet ideal that its republics should be 'national in form and socialist in content' was radically reconfigured. As Edgar concluded, the Soviet project to construct a unified Turkmen nation and modern, socialist society enjoyed more success with the former goal than with the later. After 1991, the Turkmen elite quickly abandoned atheist and socialist ideology and incorporated ideas about spirituality that were imagined to be in line with the 'national spirit'. Turkmenbashi had an early sense of the important role that Islam could play in his project, as his *Hajj* in 1992 testified. Initially it seems that the political leadership looked to Islam to exert a civilizing force, a policy attested in the promotion of educational and architectural ties with internationally recognized Islamic centers. At the same time though, the concept of a distinctively Turkmen Islam became very prominent. The Turkmen government promoted its vision of Islam as an intrinsic part of the country's national identity, as conducive to stability and progress, and above all as a means of sacralising the power of the president. What emerged was a state-imposed version of Islam centered on the god-like figure of Niyazov-Turkmenbashi. The leader went so far as to cast himself as a new Prophet, and set his own sacred book, the *Ruhnama* (book of the soul) almost on a par with the Quran. The longest portions of the book are devoted to presenting Turkmen history from its most flattering side and to outlining the moral obligations of the citizens. Key historical sections deal with the Quran, God and the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w). Niyazov mentions differences between the *Ruhnama* and the Quran. At one point, he writes, "The Turkmens' *Ruhnama* is not a religious book…. God's book, the Quran is sacred and cannot be replaced or compared to any other book". However, in the text the *Ruhnama* is in fact compared to the Quran repeatedly: its author is described as interpreting and translating the

Quran and even as carrying out God's will. Moreover, the public dissemination of the *Ruhnama* as a sacred book and the inscription of experts from it on minarets of newly built mosques underlined Turkmenbashi's attempt at sacralising secular power.

The *Ruhnama* is not to be dismissed as an idiosyncrasy of eccentric self-indulgence: it has been a powerful means of disseminating ideological messages. By trying spiritual heritage to Turkmen heroes, national monuments, and of course to the Muslim qualities of the country's president, the regime promoted a vision of 'Turkmen Islam' analogous in principle to that of 'Kyrgyz Islam' but yet very different in practice, above all because there was little or no scope to put forward other points of view. To disseminate this spiritual agenda among the population the *Ruhnama* was made obligatory teaching material in schools and universities, where it infiltrated the curriculum in virtually every subject. Knowledge of this text became a prerequisite for obtaining any official position; it was often considered more important than professional knowledge. While in Kyrgyzstan, the promotion of the Manas epic ran parallel to religious structures, in Turkmenistan a concerted effort was made to fuse official ideology with religious teachings. Imams were obliged to display the *Ruhnama* inside mosques and incorporate it into their religious teachings. Resistance to this defamation of Islam was suppressed through arrests replacing key figures with Turkmenistan's Muslim Religious Board (the controlling organ for all official Muslim clerics).

Finally, it is apparent that Muslims underwent unprecedented persecution During the Tsarist period and same happened in Soviet period. Now after independence, it was expected that the people will get some relief from tyranny but unfortunately, it became worst. The president who assured people to give complete freedom in religious observances deceived them, because he did all this just to gain the faith and impose his personality cult. As by the study it

became clear that the four republics did not deteriorate the position of Islam to that extent as he did.

To avoid future instability, Turkmenistan needs to re-examine their policies towards Islam and step back from reliance on repression. In order to ensure the stable position, Turkmenistan needs to take measures in order to comply with its international obligations:-

1. They should take serious steps to reduce the present level of human rights abuses including by releasing prisoners convicted for their political or religious beliefs or arrested because they are relatives of opposition members, and allowing international observers such as UN reporters and OSCE representatives to monitor trials and prisons.
2. Permit political pluralism by:

a. amending the constitution and authorising the registration of other political parties besides the National Democratic Party;
b. allowing peaceful demonstrations and public expression of criticism;
c. allowing the exiled Turkmen opposition to return and participate in political life, provided it seeks political power via democratic and non-violent means;
d. Conducting elections for both parliament and the presidency under international observation.

3. Allow local and international media to operate freely, and improve access to media by:

a. allowing registration of independent print and electronic media;
b. allowing uncensored access to international electronic and print media, particularly Russian-language newspapers;
c. guaranteeing the protection of all journalists and their right to inform; and
d. providing uncensored access to the Internet;

4. Strengthen civil society by providing a proper legal basis for independent NGOs, permitting the free flow of information and lifting travel restrictions on Turkmen and foreign NGO representatives.
5. Reverse the decline in educational standards by:

a. reintroducing an eleven- or twelve-year school curriculum and five-year courses in higher education; and
b. ending the use of the *Ruhnama* as the key text for schoolchildren and students;

6. Establish a sound economic environment by:

a. creating a legal basis that protects and guarantees domestic and foreign investment;
b. changing the Foreign Exchange Reserve Fund (FERF) from a personal presidential fund to a normal budgetary mechanism, and establishing an oil fund for future generations; and
c. Privatising the oil and gas industry.

7. Undertake a wide-ranging review of legislation on religion, reforming existing laws that violate international conventions on religious freedom and adopting new laws that should:

a. permit religious education within mosques;
b. provide clear guidelines on registration of religious organisations and allow appeals in courts against refusal to register religious groups; and
c. liberalise censorship of religious publications, providing clear guidelines on what is not permitted and why.

8. Restore the credibility of the Muftiate among believers by increasing its independence.
9. Accelerate amnesties for religious prisoners, end the practice of seeking confessions before release, and provide social support for those released.
10. End the abuse and torture of religious prisoners, which merely creates greater resentment in the wider community.

11. Introduce religious specialists into government structures, dealing with religious issues, provide training for all officials on religious affairs, and give believers opportunities to practice their beliefs in state service.

CHAPTER - 6
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